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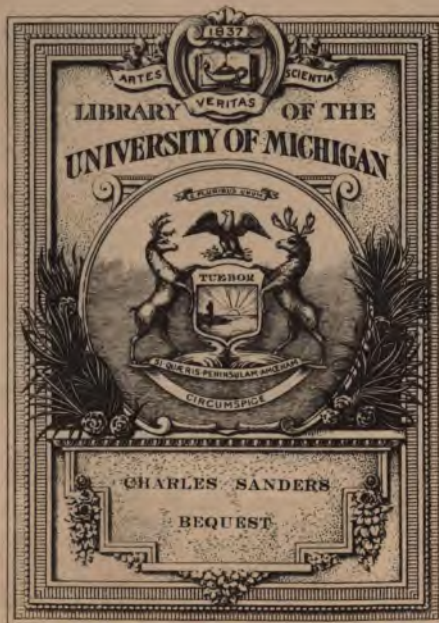
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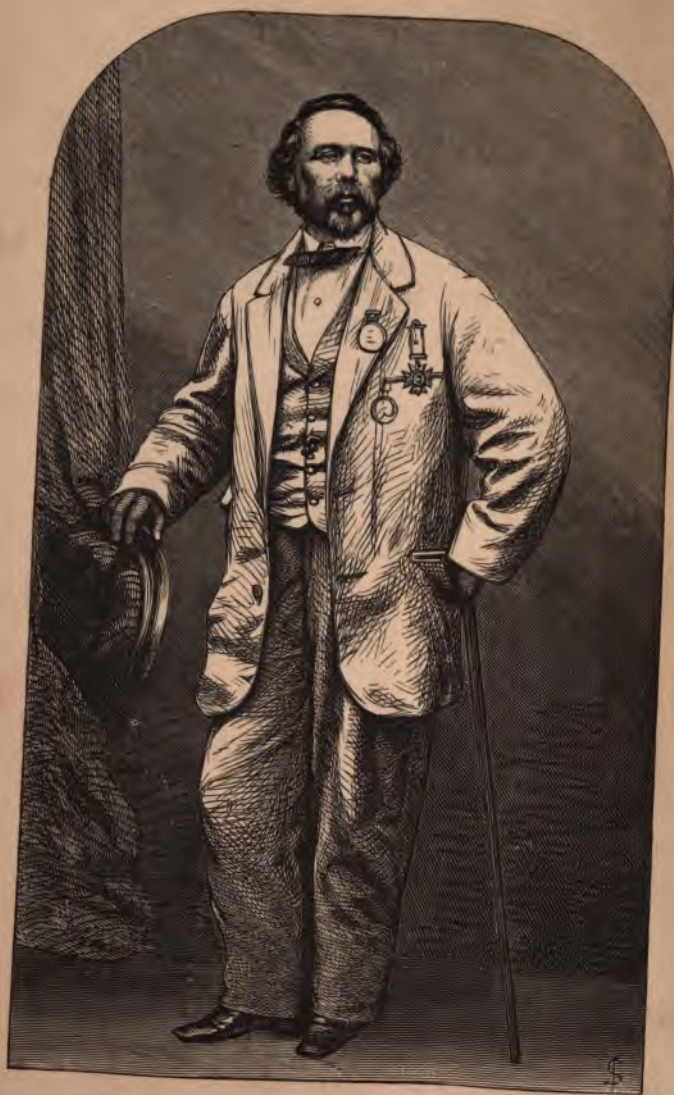
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BLONDIN:
HIS LIFE AND PERFORMANCES.





Front.

BLONDIN.



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BLONDIN:
HIS LIFE AND PERFORMANCES.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

EDITED BY
G. LINNÆUS BANKS.

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11.



TO
MADAME BLONDIN,
THE HIGH-MINDED AND EXEMPLARY WIFE
OF A BRAVE AND DEVOTED HUSBAND,
THESE PAGES ARE
DEDICATED BY
THE EDITOR.

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Charles Blondin's Account
4-23-28

PREFACE.

THE great popularity which Monsieur Blondin has achieved affords a sufficient reason for supposing that those who have taken an interest in his extraordinary performances will not unnaturally feel interested to learn something of the man himself.

If curiosity has carried hundreds of thousands of persons many miles distant to see him on the rope, the same curiosity will no doubt induce a large number of readers to make themselves acquainted with the circumstances which led him to adopt such a line of life, the means by which proficiency was attained, and the events which have signalized his remarkable career.

The narrative has been gathered partly from the joint lips of Monsieur Blondin himself, and his agent, Mr. Henry Coleman, and partly from such published accounts as chance threw in the editor's way, or as could be obtained by direct enquiry.

He has withheld nothing that was vital to its integrity, or that the public would care to know ; but he has avoided many statements which had no foundation in fact, and has varied or dispensed with descriptions of performances where they were likely to become tedious by repetition in the same form.

There is only this much more to be said : The editor has endeavoured to show that Rope-walking is not the despicable thing which some persons are apt to imagine, for which he will no doubt receive the thanks of the plumed and spangled fraternity in general.



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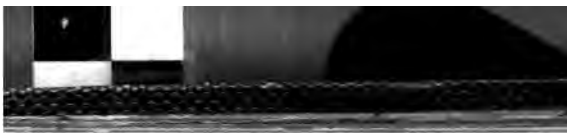
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“————— How fearful,
And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so *high* !
The crows or choughs that wing the midway air
Show scarce so gross as beetles ;
————— dreadful trade !
Methinks he seems no bigger than his head ;
. . . . I'll look no more,
Lest my brain turn.”

KING LEAR.



BLONDIN :

HIS LIFE AND PERFORMANCES.

CHAPTER I.

ROPE-DANCING AND ROPE-DANCERS.

As the history of a man who has made himself famous in any art or calling, is better judged of, and is more likely to be appreciated when we have some knowledge of the art or calling itself, it is no less in the interest of the reader, than it is an act of justice to those who have gone before, and a point of honour as regards Monsieur Blondin, to give some account of what others have attempted and achieved in the singular vocation of which he is avowedly the head—a vocation, be it remarked, of very considerable antiquity, and one that has had Agamemnons in the field long before our own day. In pagan Rome, more than two thousand years ago, instances of rope-dancing were neither few nor far between, as everybody knows, who has the least acquaintance with the pages of classical history. Suetonius makes frequent mention of it in his “Life of Nero;” and Juvenal, also,

speaking of the Greeks who inhabited Rome in his day, leads us to believe that each man was an "admirable Crichton" — grammarian, rhetorician, geometrician, poet, painter, augur, teacher of gymnastics, rope-dancer, and many more things which it is not necessary here to set down. It would seem, however, that the most accomplished human artistes in this way, at the period referred to, were often in danger of being out-stripped by brute performers. Nineteenth century England is enabled to boast of "learned pigs," "industrious fleas," and "talking fishes:" but what are these to the trained elephants of the Roman circus, who were accustomed, not only to write short sentences in Greek, and distribute them amongst the astonished spectators, but likewise to dance cleverly on the rope, and execute evolutions of the most surprising kind. Pliny relates a story of the performance on several ropes, of four elephants gravely bearing a dainty lady of their tribe in a litter, and evincing for her the tenderest solicitude, as she exclaimed, or affected to exclaim, "*Juno Lucina fer opem!*" This, suggests a modern writer, was even better as a work of *high art* in the rope department, than the feat of that famous female mountebank in the thirteenth century, who, in honour of the marriage of the French king's brother, cantered up and down a *corde tendue* on a high mettled steed, belonging to the Franconi of the period.

From the same unquestionable authorities we learn that rope-dancing has been ennobled by illustrious men; who have deemed it no derogation of their dignity to take up the vocation as amateurs. Of this class, Caligula, who paid the gentlemen of the circus the compliment of raising his horse to the dignity of consul, was undoubtedly the chief. He excelled in all manner of mountebank practices. None were too difficult or laborious for him, and as he went into the business "professionally," rather than otherwise, and was an emperor, with the blood of the Cæsars circulating in

his veins, he not unnaturally drew crowded and delighted audiences. The only drawback to his performance in the eyes of managers was, that he would insist upon exacting unheard of terms from all those in whose arenas he rode, drove, danced, fought, or wrestled. There have been other Roman emperors, who were equally addicted to the public exhibition of themselves in a mountebank capacity, of whom Maximilian was one, and the great square at Ulm, if history may be believed, was more than once a witness of his extraordinary caprices. A kindred infatuation descended to the old French court. It culminated not ungracefully in that of Marie Antoinette, and it strongly possessed the heart of the king's brother, the Comte d'Artois. The Count was accredited a skilful rope-dancer, and a very respectable juggler; and, strange though it may seem, from private rope-practice in his younger days, to the administration of a kingdom in his older days, he never allowed his hands nor his legs to forget their cunning. As Comte d'Artois he created bagatelle in a week; as King Charles X., he upset his own dynasty and raised another in half the time.

In the thirteenth century, a company of rope-dancers came from Egypt, and after performing at the Byzantine court, travelled through the greater part of Asia and all over Europe, as far as the extremity of Spain. At Constantinople, they extended the ropes, on which they first exhibited their art, between the masts of ships. Contemplating this fact, one is half inclined to believe that stupid and cruel superstition did not then prevail so much in Europe as it did at the beginning of the last century. The historian (Nicephorus Gregor) says that the company at first consisted in all of forty persons, but that fully one half their number died or were cast away on their voyage to the Moslem capital. He does not, however, tell us that any of them or their horses were burnt or beheaded, or visited with tortures or loss of personal liberty, as was the case with

the unfortunate quadruped, who having been taught to perform a number of tricks, was publicly tried at Lisbon, in 1601, and condemned to the flames; and with the unhappy Polish juggler, at Warsaw, a century and a quarter later on, who, being tortured till he confessed himself a sorcerer, was straightway hanged, without further proof of his guilt.

Rope-dancers and saltatores generally have had their patron saint, like other classes. St. Vitus is the object of their special invocation, and whoever has entered the walls of the cathedral at Prague, bearing his saintly name, cannot have failed to see groups of poor and pretty girls, from various shows in the fair there, prostrated on their knees, praying no doubt for protection and aid in tumbling decently through life—just as the fire-eating juggler mentioned by Zenophon, implored the gods to allow him to remain only in those places where there was much money and abundance of simpletons. “But the true patron, not yet a saint, of the brother and sisterhood of acrobats,” says a gossiping pen in the columns of *Temple Bar Magazine*, “is the famous Belgian Gundramnus. This eminently successful itinerant rider, rope-dancer, actor, and manager, possessed a couple of bears whom he ruled with greater comfort and propriety than any company of ‘ladies and gentlemen’ who had been indebted to him for their weekly salaries. These bears were a treasure to Gundramnus, for they were equal to any task demanded of them; and they built up a fortune for their master, and never struck for an increase of *honorarium*. They were as refined bears in their way as the one immortalised in Goldsmith’s comedy, which never danced but to the genteelest of tunes—‘Water parted,’ or the minuet in *Ariadne*.”

Curiously enough, though Rope-dancing is a walk in which very few Englishmen have attained any very great reputation, yet, as a nation, we have always admired, and generally supported, the rope-dancer. It is upon record,

that when Edward VI. passed through the City of London, "A rope as great as the cable of a ship was stretched in length from the battlements of St. Paul's steeple, with a great anchor at one end, fastened a little before the Dean of Paul's house gate, and when his Majesty approached near the same, there came a man, a stranger, being a native of Arragon, lying on the rope, with his head forward, casting his arms and legs abroad, running on his breast on the rope from the battlements to the ground, as if it had been an arrow out of a bow and stayed on the ground. Then he came to his Majesty and kissed his foot; and so after certain words to his Highness he departed from him again, and went upwards upon the rope till he came over the midst of the churchyard, where he, having a rope about him, played certain quaint mysteries, such as tumbling, and casting one leg from another. Then took he the rope and tied it to the cable, and tied himself by the right leg a little space beneath the wrist of the foot, and hung by one leg a certain space, and after recovered himself again with the said rope, and unknit the knot and came down again." Philip of Spain, husband of Queen Mary, witnessed a similar feat from the steeple of St. Paul's. Peter, a Dutchman, also went through not less surprising feats on the weathercock of St. Paul's, for which, says Hollinshead, "Peter had sixteene pounds thirteene shillings and foure pence given to him by the citie for his costs and paines for all his stuffe." There was a famous Dutchwoman too,—and these were the very last people among whom we could expect to find light and agile dancers—who, in the reign of James II., danced and vaulted upon the rope, and was very popular with the Londoners, as "she seemed every moment in danger of breaking her neck." But she was surpassed by the famous Signora Violante, who, it is told had a "stronger head," and greater length and agility of body than the fair Hollandoise, and who used to perform at

a much greater distance from the ground. Then there was a famous Turk, in the time of George II., who used to toss up oranges and catch them while on the rope, but which oranges were discovered to be "balls of painted lead;" but Signor Spinacuta performed at the little theatre in the Haymarket with "two boys tied to his feet," which was certainly as difficult as Blondin carrying a man on his back. Sadlers' Wells was then a famous nursery for tumbling and rope-dancing, Richer being the most celebrated of these performers. He was in the habit of hanging to the rope by one leg, and lying on the rope; but his great feat was what was called "roasting the pig," which consisted of turning round and round on the rope, "with incredible swiftness." None of these feats, however, surpassed in daring that which took place when Isabel, Queen of Charles VI., made her public entry into Paris. Froissart tells that a famous juggler "tyed a corde upon the hyghest house on the bridge of Saynt Michell over all the houses, and the other corde was tyed to the hyghest tower of Notre Dame, and as the Queen passed by, this sayd mayster, with two burning candles in hys handes, issued out of a littel stage, that he had made on the heyght of the tower, singing as he went upon the corde all alonge the great strete, and he bore still in hys handes the two burning candelles, so that he might be seen all over Paris, and two myles without the city. He was such a tumbler that his lightnesse was greatly praised."

The most renowned of English funambulists in olden times, after the serpents who used to dance in London on silken cords, was, undoubtedly, Jacob Hall. "His symmetry," says the gossiping writer already referred to, "his elegance, his strength, and his courage, rendered him the dear delight of the fashionable ladies of King Charles the Second's time in general, and of Lady Castlemaine, who patronised excellence, and pensioned Jacob,

in particular." "Have you ever had any mischief by falls?" asked the quaint Pepys of the rope-dancer. "Aye, many," said Jacob; "but never to the breaking of a limb." So popular was this Adonis and Hercules of acrobats, that after the conclusion of Bartholomew Fair, where he had enchanted all beholders, and paid the king's trumpeter his usual fee for permission to sound an *alarm* in Smithfield, he would set up his ropes in Charing Cross, or in Lincoln's Inn Fields, where he attracted such enthusiastic crowds, that the public circulation was checked, and the magistracy had to put some restraint upon the graceful and powerful mountebank. "Lady Mary," as she was called, of Bartholomew Fair; Wilson, another daring rope-dancer, in his day; and Madame Saqui, whose terrible ascents when she was reaching the patriarchal age of threescore and ten, struck dismay into the hearts of thousands on the *Place de la Concorde*, during the last days of the Bourbon regime in Paris, are the only other chief artistes of the hempen highway who occupy the interregnum of acrobatic history, between the middle of the seventeenth, and that of the nineteenth centuries. Chapman of Ryan's once famous equestrian corps, and Herr Hengler, of more recent date, strove at marvellous things, but their highest efforts paled as much in comparison with those of their predecessors, as they certainly fall short of what Monsieur Blondin has since achieved.

CHAPTER II.

BLONDIN'S EARLY DAYS.

THE French nation has for a long period enjoyed the privilege, if privilege it may be called, of supplying us and the rest of the world, with the most accomplished acrobats of every description; the splendid nerves of the French, combined with their small, light heads, and compact bodies, enabling them to preserve their composure, and poise themselves with ease, in positions where the heavier, full-blooded Englishman could hardly maintain a footing. Wherever an Englishman has anything to hold by, wherever his sinews and muscles can be brought into vigorous play, he can readily rival his more mercurial neighbour in deeds of hardihood and daring—as for instance, in the rigging of a ship, or with a musket and bayonet in his grasp; but when the work to be done is to trip lightly over a rope 200 feet from the ground, to catch a flying trapeze, or gracefully ride a spirited steed in a circus, the physical peculiarities of the Gallic organization give the French many advantages—a more striking proof of which cannot be adduced than the subject of these pages.

On the 24th of February, 1824, in that ancient seat of French ecclesiastical learning, St. Omer, Pas de Calais, little Blondin made his *entrée* on the stage of life, and was

fondled on the parental knee by one of Napoleon's heroes, decorated with the Cross of the Legion of Honour—one of the hardy and gallant few who survived not only the victories of Wagram and Austerlitz, but that disastrous Russian campaign, when fire and frost combined to cut off three-fourths of a magnificent army; and as the infant merged into the boy the veteran soldier recounting o'er and o'er his "many tales of battles lost and won," found a greedy listener in his hopeful son, to whom each deed of daring or endurance was a noble incentive to action. Prior to the death of his father (who sank prematurely from the effects of the hardships endured while following the Eagles of his Imperial master), and when young Blondin was not more than five years old, a travelling company of equestrian and acrobatic performers pitched their tent one day near the paternal home. He, in common with the boys of the neighbourhood, became a wondering spectator of their exploits; and it was soon obvious that those exploits had produced a powerful and abiding effect upon his infantile mind. With marvellous adroitness for a child of his tender years, he began to imitate some of the "hair breadth escapes" witnessed by himself and companions in the professional arena; and ere long, he succeeded in accomplishing a variety of gymnastic feats, such as no child of his age had ever before attempted.

"The child," says the poet Wordsworth, "is father of the man," and no one could have witnessed the first rude efforts of the boy Blondin, after returning home from the performances of that peripatetic troupe, without discerning in them something more than mere imitation. His attention had been particularly attracted by the showy appearance and display of a young gentleman in blue tunic, fleshings, and spangles, who exhibited considerable skill and elasticity, both on the tight and slack rope; and he resolved that not an hour should pass over without his attempting something

of the same sort. He accordingly procured a piece of strong cord, and affixed it to the upper rungs of a couple of chairs, placed *dos-a-dos* at a little distance apart. On this he mounted to make his first essay in rope-dancing, when, as a matter of course, the imperfect machinery collapsed, and the young mimic fell to the ground equally surprised and alarmed. A few tears succeeded the mishap, and Mamma Blondin hastened to lift up her precocious son and heir, glad to find no worse result than a few bruises where she really feared a broken limb.

" But childhood's tears, though freely shed,
Are soon forgotten."

And although the bruises disappeared, his ambition did not, for having fairly mastered the idea that the lightness and instability of the chairs had caused them to fall inwards (he knew nothing of their want of balance), he set about securing a fresh line. This time he possessed himself of a much stronger cord, and secured it to the posts of a gateway, intending to "astonish" a number of admiring playmates with his youthful daring. Alas! the cord was not yet strong enough, nor his father's fishing-rod a sufficient balancing-pole; so down he came again with a blank countenance, a splintered rod, and a sprained wrist, but no bones broken, nor any wavering in his determination. His mind was resolutely bent upon success; and hope, the life-spring of enterprise, the polar-star of ambition, fascinatingly lured him on.

Sweet hope! are not thy visions often as the mirage of the fruitless desert? and yet are they not pleasant to contemplate? Do they not buoy up the soul, and urge poor, timid, and desponding human nature on to the achievement of things which otherwise would never have been? Poets have sung of thy pleasure, and sages and philosophers have experienced thy promptings, regarding them often as a





Boyish Feat.

divine inspiration; another Promethean fire to animate their souls, and strengthen them for renewed efforts in the great battle of life; and notwithstanding that thy prophetic impulses and promised joys have been sometimes as destitute of result as is the floating bubble of solidity, still are we ever and anon sustained by thy latent and holy flame, new prospects disclosing for the beguilement of mankind. Hope, the paradise of earth, in which all find a refuge, never deserted little Blondin. Perhaps he had read something of that spider-story in the prison-history of Bruce of Bannockburn. Be that as it may, he busied himself late and early in prosecuting his tight-rope adventures; but afraid to name them to his father, who was angry at the loss of his "Piscator," as he called it, he confided the secret of his failures and aspirations to an old sailor, with whom he had formed one of those intimacies which, however apparently anomalous, are, in many instances, more enduring, and bear better fruit than ordinary boy-friendships between compeers in age and condition. The veteran man-o'-war's-man, proud of his confidante's spirit and energy, made him a present of a piece of boat's cable, and himself fastened it securely for the brave tyro, at a reasonable height from the ground, at the same time providing him with an old spar to serve the purpose of a balancing-pole. With no eye-witness but his sailor-friend, he at length succeeded in crossing the rope—this time a firm one,—and the ambition of his young life was attained.

Elated at his success on the rope, with the versatility of childhood, and no small degree of temerity, he very shortly turned his attention in a new direction. He had seen his paragon in blue and silver swing from the slack-rope in various postures, and Jacques Le Brun, his sailor-friend, had early initiated him in the mystery of climbing like a cat or a tar; so that it was with little trouble he mounted a large tree growing near his home; but after scaling the

trunk he passed on to one of the lower branches, sitting astride it, and gradually nearing the end, until it swayed loosely beneath his weight, the vibration bringing him nearer the other boughs. After several ineffectual attempts he contrived to clutch the branch above him, and with a surprising effort swung himself upon it; from that he passed onwards and upwards, and a few days' incessant practice gave to him an agility on his tree-swing almost rivalling that of a monkey.

His parents very naturally looked on with wonder and delight. They saw in him the germ of something which for the moment wanted a name, but which they felt persuaded would, in due time, ripen into a substantial reality. Their hearts' wish was to foster, as far as possible, the singular grace manifested in his juvenile mimic displays; and they accordingly placed him under the care of the proprietor of L'Ecole de Gymnase, at Lyons, who as a teacher and trainer of young riders and rope-dancers was altogether unequalled; for, to his credit be it spoken, unlike Ducrow, that famous equestrian and gymnast, he had more faith in coaxing than in severity. He succeeded by kindness alone, a word that had no place in Ducrow's vocabulary, as the following characteristic anecdote places beyond doubt. On a particular occasion that nonpareil of true dramatic clowns, Mr. Joseph Grimaldi, was present while Ducrow was giving a lesson to various professional pupils or apprentices taken from some metropolitan workhouse. They were dull and timid, and their great master dismissed them from the circus with every bone of their body aching under the blows of his swift and vindictive cane. As they were limping away, he turned in an apologetical fashion to the good old clown, and remarked, "You see, Mr. Grimaldi, it is absolutely necessary to make an impression." "I don't object to the impression," said Joe, in his quietly humorous way; "what I object to is, the whacks (*wax*) being so hard."

Favoured by an indulgent, as well as skilful master, the future Hero of Niagara progressed so rapidly at L'Ecole de Gymnase, that in less than six months he was announced, with much pomp and circumstance, to make his first appearance in public. The newspapers and handbills of the day agreed in denominating him a "little wonder," and what the printer had ventured to assert in black and white, the public *en masse* eagerly confirmed. His *debut* was, to use a familiar expression, the "greatest hit" ever known in the city of Lyons.

Success followed his footsteps from the first moment that he bounded into the magic circle, where thousands of eyes looked on in mute astonishment at the extraordinary feats of our young hero. From Lyons, his fame spread with unusual celerity, and in a few months the name of the boy Blondin, celebrated for a variety of exploits, but chiefly in rope-dancing, passed from lip to lip throughout the principal theatres and *salons* of France and its capital. His name was everywhere at a premium. Handsome offers were made, and numerous inducements held out to him, to break faith with the proprietor of "L'Ecole de Gymnase;" but he resolutely resisted every such overture. With what reward will be seen hereafter.

CHAPTER III.

HE JOINS THE RAVEL FAMILY.

WHOEVER has watched the growth of the young mind, cannot have failed to discover that precocity is in many instances mere manifestation of disease—the disease of a very fine, but weak nervous organization. Our young Rosciuses and Sapphos, and almost all short-lived wonders of that kind, end at last in the feeblest of common places. There is no law, however, precise and absolute in the matter, since the difference of age at which men attain maturity of intellect is very striking. The tumultuous ebullition of youth has, we know, given birth to many magnificent things in art and letters, which the world will not willingly let die; but no less glorious creations have started from the brain in the tranquil ripeness of years, and even old age. There is, be it repeated, no precise law with regard to intellectual development, but the same thing cannot be said of our physical nature. Here, the law of life is sharply defined. There need be no short-lived precocity, unless we will it, but a gradual progress from youth to manhood. Whatever the boy attains to, the man may by perseverance transcend, if he choose. “If he choose”—three words of mighty power, and in which the secret of all success lies concealed. “The longer I live,” says Sir

Thomas Fowell Buxton, "the more I am certain that the one essential difference between men—between the feeble and the powerful, the lofty and the insignificant—is energy, invincible determination—a purpose once fixed, and then death or victory. That quality will do anything that *can* be done in the world; and no talents, no circumstances, no opportunities, no patronage will make a two-legged creature a man without it"—a conviction of which the mind of little Blondin had an intuitive perception."

From the mention of the many celebrated names which occur in the opening chapter of this work, it will at once strike the reader that the future Hero of Niagara was cutting out for himself no inconsiderable amount of severe labour when he yielded to the fascinations of the tight-rope. He was not about to enter upon a new field, in which mediocrity, in the absence of precedents and rivals would be sure to meet with an ample reward. The stage on which he essayed to play a conspicuous part was almost "as old as the hills;" had been trod by acrobats ancient and modern, who were the wonder and delight of vast assemblies; was crowded with traditions and reminiscences of great failures and great successes—failures enough to discomfit any ordinary mortal, and successes achieved only after tremendous and incessant exertion, and long and patient waiting for the stamp of public approval. Still, he formed his resolution, and steadily adhered to it alike through good fortune and ill fortune.

Left an orphan when only nine years of age, he accepted his new position with the calmness and temper of a young philosopher; determined, if the profession he had chosen was arduous and toilsome, his should be the courage to face and overcome every obstacle. Whatever feat he desired to perform, he attempted and practised with unflagging pertinacity until he achieved complete success; and to this constant exercise of his muscular powers, combined with the

high resolve that animated him in all he did, may be attributed the fact that he rose to manhood a prodigy, without a rival. His intense popularity in his native country induced the agent of the Ravel family, the well-known French troupe of equestrian and acrobatic performers, to offer him an engagement to join their company in an extensive tour through the United States. This was in the year 1851. He accepted the offer made to him, set out upon his Transatlantic journey, and confidently looked forward to becoming as great a favourite with the American public as he had previously been with the French.

Many a knight of the sock and buskin who can deport himself with the bravery of Leonidas, so long as he is bedizened with paint and spangles, is yet found to cut a very sorry figure when his courage comes to the test in actual life. Some years back, when Ducrow, the most graceful and daring rider of his age, had his circus erected in the city of York, he would occasionally have a run with the York and Ainsty, or with the Earl of Harewood's hounds; and it is related of him, that while the late earl, then Mr. Lascelles, would charge over a rasping fence, with both feet dropped from his stirrups, and without interrupting any conversation he might be engaged in, Ducrow would bide his time, wait till the fence was "topped" by two or three horses charging over it, and then take the diminished height by a safe and quiet "jump." In the sawdust Ducrow was supreme; but bowling over ridge and furrow, or flying at a fence, he was a very prudent and unassuming man.

Of Blondin it may be said, however, that he is bold and determined under all circumstances. An incident occurred during his voyage out which well merits a place in any account of his life, as it serves to demonstrate that his daring on the tight-rope is not the mere result of long and persevering practice, but that he had in him then the germs of that indomitable courage which has since contributed so





Gallant Rescue by Blondin

materially to establish his world-wide fame. During the raging of a violent storm, a young man of noble birth, who chanced to be a passenger on board the same ship with him, was suddenly precipitated overboard, as the ship rose and sunk in the black abyss of waves that yawned around her. Blondin, with a bound, sudden as that of the panther, leaped after him; the winds shrieked and howled like demons let loose, and the hissing surging waves swept mercilessly over them; but the "strong swimmer," the future Hero of Niagara, breasted them notwithstanding, and courageously approached the drowning man in time to save him. Struggling gallantly against desperate odds, he reached the ship and was drawn up in safety, but not before he had securely lashed his fainting companion in the rope that was thrown out to him. Deeds like these go far to prove that Blondin's is no artificial courage.

Having arrived in the States, New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and other cities of the vast American republic, saw his star rise higher and still higher in the ascendant. His like had never been witnessed before. He was "a master of arts" in more senses than one. Except in equestrianism, there was no gymnastic or curious performance in which he did not excel. What less finished artistes accomplished with great effort alone, and with much preliminary precaution, he could execute without visible exertion or preparation, save of the most ordinary kind. And then the Arab-like finish and skill with which he went through his various evolutions! He was more like a fantastic sprite than a human being. People looked on, and disbelieved their own eyes. Had he lived a century or two earlier he would have been treated as one possessed of a devil; for no decrepit old woman in a red cloak, suspected of being a witch—no mysterious investigator of the physical sciences—no alchemist or astrologer, ever had more terrible charges of witchcraft or evil agency alleged against them, than might

have been fairly laid at his door. He could both walk the rope, as a bird cleaves the air, and leap with the precision and elasticity of the antelope.

To exemplify this, and show the ease with which he vaulted over obstacles literally, as well as figuratively, it is only necessary to relate the following—one out of many interesting anecdotes which the reader has doubtless already met with in print. One day at Niblo's celebrated Garden in New York, where the Ravel Family and Blondin were engaged in fulfilling a successful engagement, the ordinary morning rehearsal was agreeably enlivened by a novel incident:—A performance illustrative of some of the Bedouin Arabs was being gone through, ready for that evening's programme, and at a particular stage of the business one person represented a prisoner surrounded by a crowd of soldiers armed with muskets and fixed bayonets, from the midst of which he had to clear himself by a vigorous leap. Antoine Ravel, who was to make the jump, was busy rearranging the grouping of the soldiery, it not being exactly to his mind, and Monsieur Blondin, attired in ordinary citizen's costume, stood close by, watching with a curious eye the slow progress of affairs. Suddenly, by one of those erratic impulses which at times come over him and impel him to attempt the most hazardous enterprises, and without the slightest intimation of his intention, he took three or four hurried steps, and then with a tremendous bound threw a double somersault over the entire group—Antoine, soldiers, muskets and all—and instantly subsided into his former attitude of repose, as though he had done nothing at all out of the way, and the moving mass of bayonets were only so many bulrushes.

One deed of daring almost invariably gave rise to another still more venturesome in its character, until his uniform success in whatever he undertook, his immense popularity, and the very considerable gains he had brought



An Incident at Niblo's Garden.

to others rather than himself, suggested to Blondin the idea of making some extraordinary effort, hitherto unattempted by mortal man, as a means of realising a fortune of his own. He pored over the thought for days, weeks, and months; but all his ideas were crude and vague in the extreme, until, strangely enough, a very remarkable circumstance, and one that reads more like a fable of nursery lore than anything else, gave shape to his imagination, and induced the wonderful achievement that caused his rope to become the high road alike to fame and fortune, earning for him the flattering title of "Monarch of the Cable."

It was on a Saturday night, of all nights in the week, that having completed an eight years' engagement with the Ravel Family, he was induced to participate in the festivities of a public dinner, in the first place, commemorative of his long and honourable connexion with the troupe, and, in the next place, expressive of the high esteem in which he was held, and of the deep regret felt by its members at his contemplated retirement. It was a day to be remembered in his eventful career; he felt elated by the tribute so spontaneously paid to him, and accordingly indulged in the pleasures of the table to an extent much beyond his wont. The night was already far advanced when he retired to rest, and consigned himself to the embraces of balmly sleep.

The outer, visible world was now a blank to him—the inner, invisible world had usurped its place. Lo! he dreamed a dream. He stood, as it seemed to him, beside the Falls of Niagara, awed and overpowered by the terrible sublimity of the scene. The wild, booming roar of its onward-sweeping waters, to which the incessant discharge of a hundred pieces of artillery is like the sound of a pop-gun to an Armstrong breech-loader, fell upon his ears with supernatural significance; and his eyes were dazzled by the rainbow hues that gathered in glory below the Falls. All on a sudden his garments dropped from him; a mantle, as from some fairy

CHAPTER IV.

HIS NIAGARA ADVENTURES.

ON an early day he set out on a visit to the Falls, and without making his intention known to any one, personally assured himself of the practicability of conveying a rope across from one bank to the other, and there securing it as a bridge for him to pass over. For the moment, however, an insuperable obstacle stood in his way. The plans he had laid down could not be carried out in the winter, because of the frost; for even supposing the rope to be carried over, the mist and spray ever rising above its waters, would not only have saturated the line and coated the frail pathway with slippery ice, but have rendered it as brittle as glass, and therefore unsafe. He had consequently to rest on his oars awhile, awaiting the advent of a more propitious season.

The spring of 1859 arrived in due course; and Blondin, true to the compact into which he had entered with himself, made his appearance in the village, took apartments at the hotel where all the notable visitors stay, announced his project, and commenced preparations for proceeding with it. Just as he anticipated, every second person out of the large concourse of visitors who thronged the place was disposed to vote him insane; and the probability is, that had Niagara

been in England instead of America, either the Government of the day would have been appealed to to put a stop to it, or a commission in lunacy, levelled at his devoted head, would have made him acquainted with the interior of Hanwell. Fortunately for Monsieur Blondin, the American Legislature is not at all sensitive on the score of such trifles. There is no legislative enactment, or desire, to prevent any citizen disposing of himself after what fashion he will. That is one of the glorious privileges of being an American subject; and the gallant little Frenchman, who was by this time half a convert to Transatlantic ideas, did not hesitate to take advantage of it. He entered into his scheme unmolested. The hempen cord was "hackled and twisted," and eventually it stretched its slender length across the mighty River, at an elevation of 160 feet above the water on the one side, and 170 on the other.

To those who have never visited the Falls, but who have simply met with some dull matter-of-fact description of them in the pages of a popular school-book, it is difficult to convey any adequate idea of the stupendous and awe-inspiring character of this, one of the grandest objects of nature which the world possesses, and of the consequent difficulties which beset Monsieur Blondin in the undertaking he had proposed to himself. It may be stated, in so many words, that the Falls lie between the lake Erie and Ontario, in North America, and are divided by a small island in the middle, the fall on the Canadian side being 600 feet wide, of a semi-circular form, and called the Horse-shoe; and that on the American side 350 feet. The perpendicular height is 160 feet, the cloud of vapours can be seen at a distance of thirty miles, and every traveller who has made a pilgrimage to the spot, laments his inability to describe, as he would wish, the effect produced upon the mind by the noise, tumult, and rapidity of such an immense volume of rushing waters. When Mr. Silk Buckingham visited Niagara, in

the course of his North American travels, he was constrained to apostrophise it in language worthy alike of the man and the occasion :—

Hail! Sovereign of the World of Floods, whose majesty and might,
First dazzles—then enraptures—then o'erawes the aching sight :
The pomp of Kings and Emperors, in every clime and zone
Grows dim before the splendour of the glorious water-throne.

No fleets can stop thy progress, no armies bid thee stay ;
But onward—onward—onward—thy march still holds its way ;
The rising mist that veils thee, as thine herald goes before,
And the music that proclaims thee, is the thundering cataract's roar.

Thy diadem is an emerald green, of the clearest, purest hue,
Set round with waves of snow-white foam, and spray of feathery
dew.

While tresses of the brightest pearls float o'er thine ample sheet,
And the rainbow lays its gorgeous gems, in tribute, at thy feet.

Thy reign is of the ancient days, thy sceptre from on high,
Thy birth was when the morning stars together sang with joy :
The sun, the moon, and all the orbs that shine upon thee now,
Saw the first wreath of glory that entwined thine infant brow.

And, from that hour to this, in which I gaze upon thy stream,
From age to age—in winter's frost, or summer's sultry beam—
By day, by night—without a pause—thy waves with wild acclaim.
In ceaseless sounds, have still proclaimed, the Great Eternal's name.

For whether on thy forest banks, the Indian of the wood,
Or since his days, the Red man's foe, on his fatherland have stood—
Whoe'er has seen thine incense rise, or heard thy torrents roar,
Must have bent before the God of all! to worship and adore!

The chasm is 1100 feet across; and, spanning this tremendous space, at this dizzy height, was the fragile bridge (almost as narrow as that El Arah upon which Mahomet makes his followers cross to Paradise), fixed for the eventful 30th of June, 1859—the first time that any human being had the temerity to cross a “boiling cataract,” still less the terrible Niagara, where the novelty of the position, the uncertainty of fastenings, the inexperience of assistants, and other sources of danger, were all rendered ten-fold more formidable, from the fact that no human hand could extend the feeblest aid in case of accident, and that to miss the footing was to meet with certain death. An audience every way befitting the occasion graced the marvellous scene. Canadian steamers arrived with excursionists from Toronto and elsewhere, and the railway cars from Buffalo literally swarmed with eager and expectant eye-witnesses. In all 25,000 persons of all classes, ages, and degrees of social rank were present, including statesmen, judges, divines, generals, members of Congress, capitalists, artists, newspaper editors, learned professors, blue-stocking belles, and others who belonged to the educated and well-to-do circles. House-tops, windows, scaffoldings erected for the purpose, and various eligible points on *terra firma*, were occupied with curious spectators, many of whom wagered considerable sums of money on the “coming event.” The bridge was also densely packed with sight-seers, while the enclosures on both sides of the river exhibited a mass of animated moving faces. In short, the scene was of the most interesting and exciting character, and Monsieur Blondin might well feel proud of the homage so unanimously paid to his boldness and intrepidity. Every eye scrutinizingly glanced towards him as he made his appearance, plainly and simply attired; whilst the air rang with shouts and cheers of the heartiest kind, which were renewed at intervals until the moment for his adventure arrived.





Niagara.

After inspecting some of the guys, M. Blondin picked up his balance-pole, stepped nimbly upon the rope, and started on his journey for the British Province of Upper Canada. Proceeding towards the centre of the cable, he seated himself complacently, and took a look at the scene around him; starting again, he proceeded towards the other shore, again stopped, lying at full length on his back for a moment, turned a back somersault, and regaining his feet, walked rapidly to his landing place, having been but five minutes on the trip. On his arrival he was greeted with loud cheers, while the band struck up the "Marseillaise." After an interval of twenty minutes, he again made his appearance on the rope, this time with a picture-taking apparatus on his back. Advancing some two hundred feet from the shore, he lashed his balance-pole to the cable, unstrapped his load, adjusted it in front of him, and took a "likeness" of the people and the shore. Having completed this to his satisfaction, he shouldered his machine, unlashd his balance-pole, and went backward to the place whence he came. In a few minutes the little man was seen coming towards America, attached to a heavy lumbering chair. When about a third of the way out, he placed the chair upon the rope, seated himself thereon, crossed his legs, and gazed around with apparent unconcern. He then adjusted two legs of the chair on the cable, and again seated himself. Coming nearer to the American shore, he got up and stood in the chair. During a portion of these absolutely miraculous antics, the people held their breath, and several persons fainted away. When all was over, M. Blondin reached the shore apparently little fatigued, the whole performance having occupied about an hour. He was enthusiastically received on his arrival, many of the spectators (ladies and gentlemen) eagerly pressing forward to shake him by the hand.

When the newspaper reports of the affair reached England, metropolitan editors inserted paragraphs as they would

of any monstrous fable, with a quiet "pooh! pooh!" in the privacy of the editorial retreat. These were copied (as such things are) into the country papers, and whilst some people disbelieved, others marvelled at what they read. Then came across the Atlantic a positive and seemingly well authenticated contradiction of the whole story, got up, it afterwards turned out, by the hotel-keepers of Newport and other places, who finding that the attractions of Niagara were rapidly thinning their houses, resolved to denounce the whole story as a deliberate hoax. "There was," it was said, "no such person as Monsieur Blondin. He was as great a myth as the Sea Serpent, or the Cock Lane Ghost. Niagara had not been crossed, nor attempted to be crossed;" and the sagacious wise-acres who had avowed their disbelief of the first report, congratulated themselves on their peculiar foresight in proclaiming it a "Jonathan" from the beginning. But fresh, and this time perfectly reliable intelligence came to confirm the first report of the Niagara acrobatic adventures. M. Blondin was not an idle phantom floating in the imaginative brain of the New York penny-a-liners, but a veritable flesh and blood reality, to which thousands of persons could bear testimony, and the sceptics and knowing ones were dumfounded for ever.

Meanwhile, M. Blondin was giving further proofs of his unparalleled courage in the presence of still larger and more excited assemblages even, it being one of his peculiarities to keep up the interest of his exhibitions by a constant display of new acts of daring and intrepidity. On the 4th of July, in the same year, he crossed the Falls, blindfold, in a heavy sack made of blankets. On the 16th of the same month he crossed trundling a wheelbarrow, with which he performed many unprecedented tricks. On the 5th and 19th of August he again renewed his acquaintance with the Niagara cable, in each instance before a mighty multitude, and on the latter of the two occasions

accomplished the wonderful feat of bearing a man on his back the whole length of the journey over the Falls. Now and then, as he carried his living freight along the slender track, he made a feint of slipping, as if his position were really insecure, which, as often as it was repeated, sent a thrill of horror through the veins of many whose nerves were not of the strongest.

It is somewhere related of that clever and eccentric preacher, the Rev. George Whitfield, as shewing his marvellous power in leading the imagination of his audience captive, that in one of his sermons he figuratively conducted the blind Bartemeus to the verge of a steep precipice, whereupon Lord Chesterfield, who was among his hearers, involuntarily rose, and screamed "Egad! he's gone!" He was not gone, any more than M. Blondin was gone when he made a feint of toppling down from the dizzy height where he stood; but such things show how sensitive and apprehensive of danger some minds are where there may be little or no danger at all.

By way of recording their unequivocal approbation of this novel and bold undertaking, the citizens of Niagara presented him with a magnificent Gold Medal, bearing the following inscription:—"Presented to Mons. I. F. Blondin by the citizens of Niagara Falls, in appreciation of a feat never before attempted by man, but by him successfully performed on the 19th August, 1859, that of carrying a man upon his back over the Falls of Niagara on a tight-rope." A massive gold-headed cane, of chaste and elaborate workmanship, was likewise presented to him by the leading members of the New York press, bearing the following inscription:—"To I. F. Blondin, from his friends, Erastus Brooks, *New York Express*; N. F. Woods, *London Times*; Augustus Rawlings, *Frank Leslie's Paper*; William Ward, R. B. Coleman, and others." A further similar tribute was paid him by the young squaws of Niagara.

On August 27th, agreeably to announcement, Blondin repeated his performance in the character of a Siberian slave, being heavily burdened with shackles from head to foot; and on the night of the 2nd September, in addition to other break-neck acts, he stood on his head midway across the Falls, surrounded by a protracted blaze of fire-works. This was his last Niagara exhibition in 1859. During the following year, after a series of brilliant receptions in various parts of the Union—on one occasion offering to carry the corpulent Amodio, of the Cortesi Opera Company, on a rope, from the stage of the theatre to the gallery, and Amodio was perfectly willing, but Mr. Nixon, the lessee, refused to encourage the idea—and on another, ascending from the stage to the upper gallery of the Troy Theatre, bearing on his shoulders, first the popular comedian, Mr. T. G. Riggs, and afterwards Captain Lum-Smith of Transatlantic notoriety—Monsieur Blondin again crossed the Falls many times, introducing new feats which literally caused the spectators' "hair to stand on end." His last performance at this memorable spot was given before H.R.H. the Prince of Wales and suite, including His Grace the Duke of Newcastle, Earl St. Germans, the Marquis of Chandos, Lord Lyons, General Williams, Major Teasdale, Major-General Bruce, and many other distinguished personages, on the 14th September, 1860, and in the presence of a vast multitude of spectators who had been attracted to the spot, thousands coming over two hundred miles to enjoy the novel treat. The Great Western Railroad of Canada, and the New York Central Railroad Company, sent excursion trains from various points on their respective lines, freighted with anxious and eager crowds. On this occasion, Blondin put the climax to all his other achievements.

The Prince and suite arrived on horseback at four o'clock, the hour fixed by His Royal Highness for the performance

to take place, and occupied a rustic lodge, surmounted by the French flag. Having gone through his usual performances—standing on his head, carrying a man across on his back, making believe to stumble, turning somersaults, and scaring almost every second person present half, if not completely, out of his senses—Blondin announced to the Prince that in his honour he would do what had never been done before in public—cross on *stilts*. His Royal Highness remonstrated, and said that he was satisfied, and did not wish him to endanger himself on his account, but Blondin reassured him, and finally offered in the most gentlemanly way to carry the Prince over; and had it not been for the Duke of Newcastle there is no telling what might have been the result. Finally, Blondin mounted the stilts, and successfully went over, although it was with great difficulty, and with infinite pain to all beholders. When he reached the shore the Prince and suite held a long conversation with him in French, complimenting him on his marvellous courage, and making very pressing inquiries about the state of his feelings when he was in the stilts. As the Prince left he said, "Thank God, it is all over!" In token of his admiration of M. Blondin's daring, the Prince sent him a cheque for a very handsome sum, with the accompanying note from Major-General Bruce:—"Major-General Bruce is directed by the Prince of Wales to inclose the accompanying cheque to M. Blondin, and to state that his Royal Highness viewed with much interest the remarkable display of courage and skill which M. Blondin exhibited yesterday, an interest which is qualified, however, by the personal risk to which M. Blondin must be exposed in the performance of these extraordinary feats.—Niagara Falls, Sept. 15, 1860." Had Blondin performed before Philip of Macedon, instead of young Albert of England, the probability is that that most sarcastic of monarchs would have simply sent him—a *rope*—for his neck, not his legs.

CHAPTER V.

JONES'S WOOD.

THE signal renown acquired by Monsieur Blondin, on account of his Niagara adventures, having told with visible effect upon the whole of the United States, an almost universal desire sprang up to witness his hazardous experiments; but, as he could not very readily carry the Falls round with him on a tour of the country, as Howes and Cushing or any other Equestrian company might a mammoth elephant or giraffe, he was driven to adopt a device which, in many respects, answered his purpose quite as well. He sought out perilous localities, eligible for his performance, in various parts of the Republic; and, among other famous spots, Jones's Wood—a sort of wild and romantic Vauxhall or Cremorne, on the banks of the Hudson, and close to New York—became, for a lengthened period, the theatre of his startling exploits. One day in each week was set apart for his appearance here—the rope being stretched from a lofty pole in the Wood to the opposite island, so high as to be completely out of the way of the shipping; and the many unaccountable things which, from time to time, took place at these performances are duly recorded in ~~columns~~ which both convey a lively idea of the striking resemblance there must have been between

Jones's Wood, on every such occasion, and Epsom Downs on the great day of the "Derby," and suggest, at the same time, a tolerably correct notion of the tremendous "sensational" caused by the novel exhibitions of the gallant little Frenchman.

There were present any number of minor attractions, side-shows, and charitable objects that, like a train of camp-followers in the wake of a marching army, always hang on the outskirts of a multitude. There were the same old coloured individuals who for months past had sat patiently along the fences that line the way to Jones's Wood, and made their capital out of their misfortunes, appealing beseechingly, as they held out the stumps of amputated arms or abbreviated legs, to "buy a cigar, only a penny, sir?" or some other commodity which served to shield them from the imputation and danger of downright beggars; there were, too, the same inexorable and fantastically dressed old apple women, cake peddlers, boy gamblers with their rings and pins, Aunt Sallys, wax-works, wild beasts, and pantomimic shows—sparring and drinking booths, weighing and measuring machines, lung testers, strength indicators, blind bagpipers, deformed fiddlers, melancholy accordionists, frisky negroes gyrating on the light bombastic toe to the "tum tum" of bones and banjo, and other personal spectacles too numerous to mention, whilst any quantity of fascinations of the small beer and ginger-pop order tempted the patronage of those whose teetotal tendencies inclined in that direction.

These, however, were at best but mere incidentals. The grand interest of the occasion concentrated in the approaching event, and this was discussed with a commingling of wonder, curiosity, and doubt, which indicated how much, in spite of the undeniable precedents of the adventurous Frenchman, the crowd were disposed to distrust his ability to perform the task he had assigned himself. In one who

never witnessed an undertaking of this kind, it was matter of absolute amazement. There, above the heads of the multitude, ran a line twelve hundred feet, or nearly a quarter of a mile in length, so high in air, indeed, that it seemed little larger than the ordinary rope used in the every day purposes of business, on which a human being was to trust his life in the performance of feats which it would task the ingenuity of common individuals to perform on *terra firma*. In reality, the rope was elevated some two hundred feet above the surface, and from mast to mast described the arc of a circle, which rendered the trip first on a precipitous down hill, and then up an ascent so steep as to cause the body of Blondin to bend in a perceptible angle to his task.

The time advertised for the "ascension," was three o'clock; but unfortunately owing to the inefficiency of the fastenings, Mons. Blondin was compelled to go over the work again, so that it was impossible for him to appear with his accustomed punctuality. In the meantime, he appeared in a carriage, and made a detour of the grounds, which tended to maintain the patience of the spectators. In this manner, the performance was postponed until four o'clock, when Blondin again presented himself, and, amid the loud cheers of the crowd, was hoisted to the elevation of the rope. He was dressed in his ordinary performing costume, heavily ornamented with Indian wrought bead work, presented to him by the pretty young squaws of Niagara. Having taken his breathing, a line was attached to his balance pole, an instrument about twenty-eight feet in length, and weighing thirty pounds, and which was drawn up to the level of the rope. A moment only was required to disengage the pole from the line, when without further ceremony, he stepped as boldly on the rope as if he were treading on a plank. After proceeding about fifteen rods, he came to a halt, and gently lowering himself, took a seat, and lay at

full length upon the rope. Until this moment the spectators were hushed in silence, as if their emotions were too deep for utterance, but now they burst forth with cheers that seemed the overflow of pent-up hearts. After lying for a few seconds or so in this position, Mons. Blondin arose and proceeded rapidly towards the centre of the rope, where immediately over the valley was suspended a slack rope. Here he again halted, and, sitting upon the rope, divested himself of his waistband, which, with his balance-pole and hat, he tied to the rope, an operation, by the way, which induced the inquiry from an inquisitive individual below, at the top of his voice, "How do you feel now, old feller—aint a goin' to undress yourself, be you?" Paying no attention to this and similar sallies, he proceeded to perform a number of feats, such as hanging by his arms and legs, turning somersaults, and a variety of evolutions of a similar character. Then, apparently not much fatigued, he ascended to the main rope, resumed his pole and accoutrements, and started on the completion of his undertaking. He had proceeded westward in this direction until he arrived at a portion of the rope so steep that it was evident to all he was making the most energetic exertions to ascend. A very heavy wind was blowing at the time, so much so that his balance-pole was frequently twisted in his hands, while the waving of his feathers and dress, and the manner in which he was compelled to incline forward to resist the blast, indicated the tremendous difficulties he was encountering. When the next-to impossible feat was accomplished, he adroitly descended by one of the guys, sprang into an open carriage, and, amid the uproarious plaudits of the crowd, whose astonishment and delight seemed to know no bounds, was driven in triumph to the adjoining hotel.

On another occasion, when performing for the benefit of a charitable institution, Monsieur Blondin added one more

to the number of his extraordinary achievements, by walking the entire length of the rope, fifteen hundred feet, with his understandings encased in bushel baskets of stout wicker-work, and his body bound with chains made of block tin, commencing at the neck, and descending to the ancles. He created some alarm when he first mounted the cable after this wise, by seeming to miss his footing, but speedily dissipated any notion of real danger, by advancing firmly, although somewhat cautiously, on his hempen pathway. A painful silence prevails as he raises one foot and brings it round so as to clear the other basket. But now he has felt his ground—for a rope is as good as ground to Blondin, and amid a spontaneous outburst of cheering he walks away as fast as his feet and baskets can carry him. From this moment all the people have perfect confidence in him. His perilous journey is performed without pause or special incident; he gradually slackens his pace as he nears the higher pole, and when he arrives there in ten minutes from the time of starting, he is greeted with enthusiastic cheering.

Gratitude for benefits received, is a sacred obligation. The man who is insensible to it practically ignores one of the noblest traits of human nature. He is a debtor without principle, fit only for that state of society, where his hand would be against every man, and every man's hand against him. The human being has never yet been found who would plead guilty to the charge of ingratitude—albeit it is a vice almost universally prevalent. It pervades and eats into the very heart of society, like a cancer, so that no instance of an opposite feeling can manifest itself in any conspicuous way, without at once challenging public notice. Returning home one evening after his customary performance at this famous spot, he was equally surprised and delighted to find a letter awaiting him, from the young nobleman whose life he had been instrumental in



Blondin at Jones's Wood.



saving on his voyage out to the States. It was to remind him that the morrow was the seventh anniversary of the day rendered memorable to him by his narrow escape from a watery grave, and to express a desire to give, before returning to Europe, some tangible recognition of that noble act of instinctive heroism. It concluded with a request for an interview at his hotel next morning, in order to devise some means of serving his gallant preserver.

Agreeably to this invitation, Monsieur Blondin presented himself at the hotel in question the following morning, and was embraced with all the fervour of enthusiastic friendship by his demonstrative countryman. In the course of the conversation which ensued, the Comte A—— strongly urged upon him the desirability of his quitting the “perilous profession,” as he termed it, in which he was engaged; and as an inducement to do so, volunteered to pay his expenses back to France, and use his influence with the Emperor of the French, in providing for him permanently, either by state appointment or otherwise. The proposal, although flattering in the extreme, was resolutely declined by Monsieur Blondin. He affirmed that he exposed himself to no risk, but pursued his *line* of life, from an inherent fondness for his art. He warmly thanked his noble friend for the generous services proffered on his behalf, but modestly shrank from accepting favours so great in return, for “a mere act of impulse,” as he designated it—favours which would destroy his sense of honourable independence, from the fact of their enormous disproportion to the deed which called them forth. As far as a trinket, or something of that sort, was concerned, he had no objection to preserve alike the recollection of the event, and the Comte’s kindly appreciation of that which he did without premeditation, and might do again, should a like occasion present itself, but as to anything more, it was quite out of the question. Blondin dined with the Comte the same evening, and was

introduced by him to a number of his (the Comte's) personal friends, both French and American, as the second author of his life, to whom he owed a lasting debt of gratitude. Ere the convivial party dispersed, the Comte presented Monsieur Blondin with a magnificent diamond ring, "as a gift far too slight for the value he set on the promptitude, energy, and daring, to which he owed his existence."

On the conclusion of Monsieur Blondin's series of performances at Jones's Wood, he was publicly *fêted* in New York, and his achievements were celebrated in the following song, set to music by Mr. H. H. Howard.

When we speak of the wonders of this or that age,
And tell o'er the marvels our ancestors knew,
Let us never forget that in History's page
The old is at all times eclipsed by the new;
'Tis a great law of Nature, and wisely ordained,
We cannot go back, and we cannot stand still,
While, as science advances, and things are explained,
What was counted as magic turns out to be skill.

There was great Paganini, and famed Signor Blitz,
Such rare feats performed with the gun and the bow,
They frightened poor simpletons out of their wits—
Believing them leagued with the Old One below;
While poor Father Bacon, that learned old friar,
And others who now live ennobled by fame,
Were locked up in limbo, or thrust in the fire,
And burnt to a cinder, for reasons the same.

Had Blondin but lived in the dark ages past,
When he ventured Niagara's torrents to brave,
His very first trip would have turned out his last,
Or his chance of the faggot have been a close shave;

But in this golden age, when philosophy shows
Superstition to be both a snare and a crime,
We deem his exploits not unworthy of those
Which are landmarks set up in the highway of Time.

No more let Munchausen and Gulliver write
Of incredible things they could do, or behold,
Since Blondin, the famous ærial-sprite,
Performs greater wonders than any they've told;
Who'll shew me the goblin, the fairy, the witch,
Or other strange visitor under the sun,
Could carry their freaks to as lofty a pitch,
Or enact a tenth part of what Blondin has done.

When our children grow up to man's proper estate.
And have daughters and sons of their own, be't inferred,
O'er the bright winter fire they will prattle and prate
Of the once mighty Blondin, of whom they have heard;
How a hundred feet high—without tremor or dread,
While the crowd from beneath gazed with awe on the scene—
He would walk in a sack, stand erect on his head,
Or rival the triumphs of Soyer's *cuisine*.

Then, honour to Blondin! the brave son of France,
Who travels the Rope, as a bird cleaves the air—
May his fame and his fortune together advance
And no cloud ever sully a prospect so fair!
We will drink to his health; we will toast him with cheers,
“Hip, hip, hip hurrah!” boys, come join in the strain—
We may multiply sights, as we multiply years,
But we never shall meet with his equal again.

Advantage was further taken of this opportunity, to present him with a gold medal, an exact duplicate of the one presented to him in Niagara city, but which he had unfortunately lost during one of his subsequent excursions across the Falls.

CHAPTER VI.

AN AUSPICIOUS MEETING.

M. BLONDIN had now the golden ball at his feet as few men are favoured to have it. He had built up a reputation, envied it might be by rivals of inferior merit, but which no artiste in his particular line had been found to parallel; he had won the admiration and esteem of a large portion of the American people, who respected him as much for his private character as a gentleman, as for the wondrous skill and hardihood displayed by him in his matchless performances; and, last not least, he had been honoured with flattering encomiums by a distinguished scion of the Royal Family of England; one, who, should his life be spared, was destined, at no very distant period, to become the proud and chosen sovereign of the English nation. His ambition for the moment was satisfied, and now devolved upon him the task of turning his signal success in one hemisphere to glorious account in another. The continent of Europe lay temptingly before him, and he burned with a feverish desire to weave the good opinion of all classes of Europeans in his laurel crown. He was well aware that other artistes had found it the high road to fortune, and he could see no reason why he should not follow in their wake. But an obstacle stood in the way. Although he was unapproachable

as a gymnast, he was not equally clever in a commercial sense. He had about him little in common with that notorious purveyor of marvels, Mr. T. P. Barnum. He could fulfil engagements, but he was not equally felicitous in negotiating them. He could balance himself upon the rope, but he could not with like readiness balance his accounts. He had in truth, neither the inclination nor the faculty to act as his own "agent in advance." In America or in France, where he was already known, matters could be managed well enough; but what of England, Germany, Italy, Russia, and other countries, where he was not only not "native and to the manner born," but had never once set his foot, and had not so much as a single friend or representative to act on his behalf. It was obvious he could never be his own "man of business." He must have some one to undertake that duty for him. But where was he to find a competent and reliable person? one possessing the necessary tact, experience, and ability, and who would be likely to conserve his employer's interest with the same fidelity that he would his own. That question puzzled him sorely. Such a man in such a profession was not often met with. But "fortune," it is said, "favours the brave;" and Monsieur Blondin, happily for him, was not long in testing the truth of this familiar adage.

Walking one day in Niblo's Garden, in company with the celebrated Gabriel Ravel, to whom he had unfolded his ideas, and expressed the difficulty he was likely to experience in carrying them out, from the want of a trustworthy cicerone, it was M. Blondin's good fortune to meet with one in every way eminently qualified to realize his most sanguine expectations. Mr. Henry Coleman, a dramatic author, of Transatlantic and Antipodean repute, a scholar, and a gentleman—a man of extensive travel, and world-wide experience as a theatrical manager—a far-seeing observer of men and things, and endowed with a rare spirit of enterprize, had

newly arrived in the States, and now, for the first time, crossed the path of the Hero of Niagara. "Bless my stars!" exclaimed the demonstrative Gabriel, at the same time taking hold of Mr. Coleman's hand and placing it in that of M. Blondin, "here is the very man of whom I was speaking—the man fitted beyond all others to raise you to the highest pinnacle of fame and wealth." Then turning suddenly round to Mr. Coleman, and embracing him tightly in his arms, he exclaimed, "My dear Coleman, I am delighted to see you! Where have you been all these long years? What brings you hither? Some new ninth wonder of the age, of course. But never mind; this is my friend, Monsieur Blondin, the rope-walker of Niagara Falls; he and you must become better acquainted; you must do business together, my boy—business together. You must take him to England and astonish the natives there. You must conduct him in triumph half over Europe, as you know so well how to do; it will answer your purpose, my boy, and my friend Blondin, I am well assured, will never have cause to regret that he placed himself under the direction of so able a leader."

M. Blondin invited Mr. Coleman to dine with him that evening, an agreement mutually binding and beneficial was entered into, and a plan of operations for the future at once decided upon. Active and resolute in all his undertakings, Mr. Coleman did not allow the grass to grow under his feet before proceeding to inaugurate a European campaign. He sailed for England in the month of April, 1861, in the North German Lloyd's Steam Company's steamer "New York," commanded by Captain Van Santon; and it may with truth be said, that a finer class of boats, or an abler or more courteous body of officers, than belong to this Company's service, are nowhere to be found in any part of the globe.

It ought to be mentioned here, that at the time of M.

Blondin's performance before the Prince of Wales, in course of the brief conversation which ensued between that august personage and himself, his Royal Highness took occasion to observe, that, in the event of M. Blondin proposing to visit England, the only building of sufficient magnitude to display his power to proper advantage, and to afford scope at the same time for a large body of spectators, was the Crystal Palace at Sydenham. The idea was an exceedingly happy one; and the Crystal Palace Directors and the English public at large ought to consider themselves indebted to His Royal Highness—the former for an augmented exchequer, and the latter for his having inaugurated a new era in acrobatic art in this country. It is certain, that M. Blondin's memorable *debut* in that grand Hall of Mirrors, where the world's taste, and genius, and industry, mark the progressive character of modern civilization, paved the way for the graceful Leotard, the surprising Steckel, the agile Henri and Pfau, to nightly crowd the "Alhambra," the "Canterbury," and the "Oxford," with delighted audiences. He was their pioneer—cleared the road for their reception—enhanced their marketable value and assured them of a golden recompense.

Arriving in England on the 1st of May, Mr. Coleman immediately sought an interview with Mr. George Grove, the active secretary, and Mr. R. K. Bowley, the indefatigable manager of the Crystal Palace Company, and was by those gentlemen introduced to the Board of Directors, who received him with every possible courtesy. His proposal for a series of performances was listened to with an attentive ear, and would have been accepted on the instant had not one cautious member of their body ventured to remark, in a sense adverse to the engagement—"But suppose he was to fall?" "Do what?" asked the stoical negotiator to whom the remark was more especially addressed, "Fall," repeated the Director. "Fall!" re-echoed

Mr. Coleman, with a most natural air of surprise, "Where from?" "Where from?" reiterated the other; "why, from the rope." "Blondin fall from the rope!" said the former, with a calm solemnity that regularly nonplussed his questioner, "Why he *can't*!" and that being the case, the bargain was struck—£1200 for twelve performances! a sum larger by four-fold than had ever before been paid to any rope-dancer or acrobat of any age.

The cool, business-like manner in which all doubts and ifs were thus set at rest by Mr. Coleman, is only transcended by Blondin's memorable caution to the nervous man whom he was carrying on his back across Niagara Falls: "I must request you to sit quiet," said M. Blondin, "or I shall have to *put you down*." The idea of being lifted from the performer's shoulders and left on the rope to shift for himself, kept the terrified rider in obedience to him by whom he was carried, and so they reached the desired goal in safety.

CHAPTER VII.

BLONDIN VISITS ENGLAND.

WHEN the announcement first went forth to the English people, that M. Blondin was about to present himself among them, and that the Crystal Palace at Sydenham had been chosen as the theatre of his unexampled performances, public curiosity was excited in no ordinary degree, and the month of June, 1861, was looked forward to by holiday seekers with unusual interest. The scene of his approaching *debut*, no less than the character of M. Blondin himself, disposed the English public to think well of his visit to our shores. It was felt that he had placed himself, at the outset, under the patronage of the wealthiest respectability in England. He was not about to make his bow at any place of doubtful or unestablished reputation, or where the witnesses of his exploits might be suspected of an intention to "make a night of it." Ladies and gentlemen (proper) would be able to say that they had "seen Blondin." Family gatherings and select coteries of the Upper Ten Thousand, would have an opportunity of enjoying in the ample space of the Crystal Palace transepts and gardens, the combination of a good view of the French acrobat, with the gratification of their floral tastes, and their dainty love of the beautiful and picturesque. The performances were to take place by

day, too—this was another agreeable feature in the thing; it was an inducement to hard-working people to make a holiday for themselves, and lay in a new stock of health, along with pleasant memories of Blondin and the Crystal Palace. It was not like going to a theatre, to be jammed in a crowded box, and suffocated with the heat of a thousand gas lights flaring away before and behind the curtain. No! It was the very reverse of all this; it smacked of green fields and scented hedge-rows—of a journey out of town—of unexpected meetings between friends and sweethearts—of *tête-à-têtes*, and assignations significant perhaps in their ultimate consequences, and never to be forgotten.

On the other hand, a portion of the London and provincial Press, running counter to the current of public feeling, took a very different view of the contemplated transformation of the Crystal Palace into a sort of *Cirque Nationale*. They contended that any such idea was contrary to the original intention of the promoters of the building; that such things were sadly out of character in a place fraught with high educational aims and possibilities. Perhaps, if the Directors had been at liberty to act strictly in accordance with their own taste—had their commercial prospects been all that could be desired—had the mass of the people encouraged them in their loftier and grander efforts—had they succeeded in their praiseworthy endeavour to familiarize the common mind with the history and types of architecture—to make an ethnologist of the working man—to impress the rising generation with the contrast between Seville and Persepolis—to illustrate the Byzantine and Mediæval barbarisms—to convince us of the difference between English and Italian gardening—to read valuable lessons of instruction by means of antediluvian monsters, fossil remains, and the chilling, yet eloquent appeals of Roman and Grecian statuary; had the Directors only been successful in accomplishing these things, it is

very questionable if they would have yielded to the delightful fascinations of Patti and Sims Reeves, or if, in all their aspirations after *high art*, they would ever have dreamt of such very high art as was about to be embodied in M. Blondin's performance—a performance which might almost wake the stony giants who guard the temple of Abou Simbel from their sleep of three thousand years, and recal from the Elysian fields to the plashing fountains of the cool Pompeian rooms or the gilded shadows of the Alhambra Court, the jaded ghosts of departed Roman aristocrats sighing for a “new sensation,”—or summon the Moorish followers of Bobadil to witness such a display of nerve and activity, as even the choicest athletes whose faces wore “the shadowed livery of the burnished sun,” would fail to parallel.

But it is notorious that the public at large did not resort to the place in adequate numbers—that not one person in a thousand of the general population was in the habit of visiting the Crystal Palace, for the sake of the art treasures which it contained; and that being so, and a great commercial responsibility resting upon their shoulders, there could be no impropriety in the Directors employing secondary means to accomplish a primary end. It is a thing that is done every day by public bodies for their own preservation, and for objects higher and more lasting than any purely secular undertaking. By such instrumentality nearly all public endeavour,—all active benevolence, all world-wide philanthropy, all patriotic designs are carried out to a successful issue. Trace the rise and progress of any one of those great organizations or movements which have come to pass in England during the last half century, by means of which vast and beneficent changes have taken place in our political system, our social habits, our religious sympathies; and it will be found that, for the good accomplished, we are indebted, not so much to the energy or

leadership of master minds, as to the right use, at the right time, of subordinate agencies. And if this be true of other undertakings, why treat the Crystal Palace as an exceptional case? It is not an institution supported by the government. There are no state revenues flowing into its exchequer—no munificent endowments bequeathed by benefactors of a former age. It is mainly a gigantic commercial enterprise which must be self-supporting or nothing. Without a fixed income, large in amount, it must inevitably decline and sink into oblivion, and is it not better a thousand times to sustain it by such means as the Directors are now employing, than part altogether with the glorious lessons it is capable of teaching. And, after all, who can say but that many who are attracted for the first time to the Crystal Palace by the name of Blondin, return home with their souls purified by influences that work unseen. They see Blondin, but they also unconsciously feel the ministry of something higher and more lasting than his fragile rope.

While this controversy was going on, M. Blondin landed at Southampton, and was no less surprised than delighted to find his name "familiar in our mouths as household words." He had already unwillingly passed through a like ordeal to that which befel the unfortunate Jullien when he enchanted the ears of the masses with his shilling concerts, and Jenny Lind, when she arrived in London in quest of "gold" in exchange for her glorious "notes." Coats, hats, cigars, neckties, perfumes, Manchester prints, Limerick lace, Paisley shawls, articles of confectionery, stationery, and millinery,—all bore the name of Blondin. His patronymic was high and low, near and far. Blondin here, Blondin there, and Blondin everywhere—now and then on walls in letters so large that it required a movement of the head to enable the eye to take it all in. He was put upon the boards of more than one London theatre; the music

halls paid tribute to him in the comic strains of Mackney, Stead, Forde, Marshall, Randall, Wilkinson, and other vocalists of the same school; *Punch*, *Fun*, and the newspapers went in "a buster," to use the pardonably vulgar phrase of Mr. Paul Bedford of Adelphi celebrity, in one of his most racy impersonations; and Rev. gentlemen, accustomed to address the "million," lectured about him on Sunday afternoons in gigantic edifices set apart for the ministry of secular as well as sacred influences.* If one entered the boudoir of a lady of fashion, the first question was sure to be "Shall you see Blondin?" The proverbial gossip of tea-tables, and the small talk of smoke-rooms, gave place to a similar inquiry. It was the "fashion" to talk about Blondin, and who could possibly resist an appeal of that sort. Bishops, statesmen, lawyers, doctors, grand-fashionables, and grand nobodies all obeyed the summons of the inexorable goddess. The railway stations at Pimlico and London Bridge were about to be crowded to congestion; crinoline was to half cover the double iron-way between 'town' and Sydenham; simple-minded tradesmen were to, rush out with their olive branches, five, six, and seven deep, to say nothing of mater-familias and grandma, and a young lady or two from the country; there was but one name, one sight, one thing to be thought or spoken of, and that was—Blondin.

It is on record that the House of Commons once suddenly terminated an early session in order to rush down to Covent Garden to see Master Betty play one of his principal characters. It is also said that the Lords, at a very critical moment in the trial of Queen Caroline, left the chancellor alone, while they assembled in the front of the house, with smoked glasses to their eyes, to view a rather shabby sample of an eclipse. In our own day the "Derby"

* The Rev. Arthur Mursell, in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester.

is so far recognised as a national institution that Lords and Commons both adjourn on the day on which the Blue Ribband of the Turf is contended for on Epsom Downs. There was something of this versatility of character among the ancients, as Terence the Carthaginian composer of original Latin comedies from the Greek one day found to his sorrow. The house was "crammed;" the audience were silently awaiting the first scene of a new comedy, the "Hecyra," or the "Mother-in-Law," when the general ear was struck by the announcing trumpets of a company of Blondins of that day. The temptation was irresistible. The piece had commenced; but what was the story of the loves of those two girls, Bacchis and Philumena, to the sight of the champion of wrestlers and the pink of rope-dancers? The acrobats carried the day, and the ladies were the loudest in screaming and laughing as they struggled out of the theatre, and raced hotly for seats round the circus and the saw-dust.

M. Blondin's appearance at the Crystal Palace was about to be the signal for quite as marked an ovation. Other places of amusement were destined to see their audiences grow "small by degrees and beautifully less," whilst the one at Sydenham increased more and more in numbers and in influence. Had it been announced that Gog and Magog would run a race from the Guildhall to Charing Cross and back again, it is very doubtful if a vaster assemblage of persons could have been got together, than was ready to do homage to M. Blondin's wonderful intrepidity; not so much because of any practical value which was likely to accrue from rope-walking, as it was a natural result of the popular sympathy with whatever is bold and courageous. Of all attributes of human nature, courage is the one which mostly commands universal reverence. Other virtues and qualities are associated more or less with peculiarities of race, climate, or period; but courage is as much the boast of the Red Indian in his war-paint, as of the British Grenadier deco-

rated with the Victoria Cross ;—and the quiet citizen by his peaceful fireside feels his heart warm and glow as he reads the acts of heroism performed by others whose lives have been cast amid more stirring scenes, where the one quality of courage has been called peculiarly into exercise.

Among the civilized nations of antiquity—for civilization has had many epochs—when the chances of war and the issues of battles depended less on science and tactics, than on purely physical daring and endurance, it very properly became a state duty of the highest importance to cultivate the practice of those hardy and agile exercises which both lend a grace and vigour to the body, and are admirably calculated, at the same time, to inspire men's souls with a lofty contempt of danger. Now, mankind are not all warriors by profession—the antagonism of tribe against tribe, and nation against nation, has been beneficially superseded by the onward march of religion and commerce, and the great, free, progressive peoples of the earth are content to place in the hands of the disciplined few, the honour and security of the many. Still, the human heart is true to its old instincts, and when a man of marvellous courage appears upon the mortal stage—be he the captain of a life-boat fearlessly braving death for humanity's sake ; the chief of a fire brigade, like Braidwood : an adventurous traveller like Livingstone ; a missionary to a cannibal race like the heroic Williams ; a veteran statesman like Palmerston : a warrior like Wellington or Washington ; or, be he simply a gladiator in olden times, a modern fistic champion, or an incomparable rope-dancer,—no matter ; when a man of singular courage mounts the stage of life, society at once involuntarily pays homage to him.

Nor was the homage paid to the hero of Niagara, confined to London alone. Every part of the United Kingdom seemed to catch the popular infection, and was as anxious to make the personal acquaintance of Monsieur Blondin, as

Monsieur Blondin was to become acquaintance with it. It appeared to be thought, too, that as he had managed to cross the Falls with perfect security to himself, he might also manage to cross any other dangerous current—such as the Humber or the Mersey, if not St. George's, or the Irish channel, with equal security—provided a rope sufficiently long could be procured for the purpose—and thus add greatly to his own reputation, and augment the banking account of some enterprising speculators. The most rash and preposterous proposals reached him from Liverpool, Hull, and other places, and although he was not prepared to give them a minutes' serious consideration, still, as they were all so many indirect tributes to his courage and his fame, he did not withhold a suitable response to the various writers. But it was a publican in South Staffordshire, who eclipsed all the rest by the novelty of his invention. He wanted Monsieur Blondin to walk on an iron coil, at an altitude of fifty feet, over a succession of some thirty-five or forty blast furnaces, and thus prove that he was as insensible to harm by fire, as he was by water—a perfect Salamander, in fact.

When Monsieur Blondin arrived in London, his first business was in all simplicity to look out for "quiet lodgings," and it is quite amusing to hear him, even to this day, recount the difficulties and nuisances he was compelled to undergo before the desire of his heart was fully realised. In one retired terrace or secluded crescent named after a former Marquis of Westminster's country-seat, where he had been very sanguine of meeting with perfect quietude, there was something of a rhythmic movement—it suggested the roaring of the waves as they break on the shore, or of the wind rushing through a mighty forest; and in consequence it was a source of incessant confusion to ear and brain. In another there was that variety and complication by which the torment renewed itself continually, and with

increased violence. After the parcels' delivery van had rattled past, there came the cry of "Pots!" then "Milk!" suddenly an organ broke in upon the scene; then a shout of "Band-boxes!" then of "Baskets!" then the organ again; it was the turn of the old clothesman next; after him came a Lascar beating on a drum; the strains of Ethiopian serenaders from the public-house round the corner also floated upon the ear; "Punch" squeaked past to add to the harmony; the Frenchman and his dogs set up a howling in the distance; a German brass band created discord upon system; and, as it grew towards dusk, a host of "roaring vagabonds" lined the streets, shouting one against the other—"Important news from Italy," "Awful Ribbon conspiracy in Ireland," "Latest from Paris," "Murder in Jaw-bone Alley, or Bleeding-heart Yard,"—with much more to the same effect. After numerous ineffectual attempts to get rid of the nuisance, Monsieur Blondin abandoned all hope of securing "quiet lodgings" in London, and betook himself to a remote region at the west end.

CHAPTER VIII.

HE PERFORMS AT THE CRYSTAL PALACE.

AT length the long, long looked for 1st of June arrived, and although the rate of admission was fixed at half a crown, with the option of securing a reserved seat on payment of an additional half-crown, the number of persons who flocked to the Crystal Palace was excessively large. M. Blondin's success was already a *fait accompli*, and that success has been chronicled by the distinguished author of the "Life of Grimaldi,"* but in terms so severely satirical as to leave little doubt of his contempt for a species of entertainment which Dr. Johnson took delight in; albeit, the said writer does love the sawdust, and has himself more than once donned the sock and buskin in a kindred line. He writes:—

"Here, there are ten thousand of us whom the train has poured from its cellular throat, driving up the tubular passage of the Crystal Palace, like so many black peas up a pea-shooter. We have all but one object—to see a man walk on (perhaps fall from) a rope a hundred feet high. We may tear buns to pieces, joint fowls, and devour vast ledges of sandwiches, but still the one object of all of us—

* Charles Dickens.

bishops, lawyers, authors, fashionables—is to see a rope-dancer venture his life for one hundred pounds the half-hour. For this purpose the sharp one-toothed instrument has bit to-day through so many tickets; for this vats of pale ale have been emptied; for this Regent Street and the Parks have contributed armies of languid Herculeases, and pearl-powdered Venuses. For this, paralytic old Lady Chickenliver has been dragged here in her Bath chair, and even old Lord Stiffney has hobbled from his club. Can that gentleman yonder be a popular preacher? Can that lady near him be the powerful authoress of “Night in the Upper Alps; or, Glances at the Glaciers?” Half London is here, eager for a dreadful accident, since gladiators are no longer quite the fashion. Crowded? Why, the railway station is full, the voluminous gowns are jamming up the ticket collectors’ turnstiles, statuesquely dressed Guardsmen are losing all sense of dignity, and rushing madly up the tedious and endless steps, honest tradesmen are dragging their children through all obstacles, as if they were taking thieves to prison, everybody seems afraid that Blondin may fall before they are able to take their seats. In vain the gardens spread their flowers. They have no admirers to-day. It is so delicious to see a man risk his life, without being in danger oneself, and so cheap too—for only half-a-crown. Death can be seen on a larger scale in a battle; but there, the risk is so considerable. Miné bullets, too, drive out horrible plugs of flesh, our surgeons say, and the Armstrong bolt literally tears bodies to pieces, which is unpleasant. O sweet little wearers of round hats. O dainty donnors of Mauve silks and sprigged muslins—I hear a voice saying—there was a time when all the ladies of Rome, with perfumes and fans, went daily to the Colosseum to see gigantic slaves chop each other to pieces; when the great arena was daily one huge vessel of blood; then the ladies clapped their little white hands, and stamped their little sandalled feet,

and ate sweetmeats, and laughed and chatted, and were happy as birds in spring; but, O sweet little ladies, these women were not Christians, they were Pagans, the inhabitants of the most corrupt city God ever allowed to corrupt the world. There are your ladies, too, even now, living in Spain, who shout and laugh when they see horses torn by the bull's horns, and their life-blood spout out at one gush upon the sand, and even when men are trodden under foot and crushed for their amusement. But these are people in the last degradation of a degraded religion, and of a civilization two centuries behind ours. The chiding voice, whosever it may be, is drowned by the tramp of unreasoning and hurrying feet, as we flow on in full tide, and break out into the building exactly where some Hindoos have been now for several years engaged in pretending to kill a Bengal tiger, already punctured with one arrow. But who cares for natural history, or rows of podgy kings in niches, or Greek statues, or Pompeian rooms, or lotus pillars, or Indian red monsters, when for half-a-crown one can see a man run three hundred and twenty feet on a rope a hundred feet high, and perhaps fall a hundred feet?"

But bidding adieu to "All the Year Round," long before the hour fixed for his walking the rope the excitement of the spectators was all that the most sanguine performer could desire, and the *tout ensemble* of the scene eclipsed anything that had been witnessed in the same place, save on the great festival days for which the Crystal Palace is now famed. What with the glorious sunshine streaming in through dome and transept, the flags of all nations drooping gracefully from the galleries, the fountains radiant with many hues, the continuous throng of fair and beautiful faces, the magnificent music, and the myriad objects of interest on all sides, it resembled more a picture from the Arabian Nights' tales, conjured up when vivid fancy sways the wand—dreaming visions of "Aladdin and

the Wonderful Lamp," "Sinbad the Sailor," "Cinderella and the Glass Slipper"—anything fairy-like and wonderful, rather than what was a tangible reality with plodding English people. But this is an age of wonders. We travel by steam, we dwarf the sun into a limner, and we flash our thoughts thousands of miles distant in a moment of time. This is an age of wonders; and the "Hero of Niagara," who had executed incredible feats beyond the Atlantic, in the grandest theatre of the world, was felt to be one of the number.

The day's programme embraced a variety of attractions, such as the admirable band of the Crystal Palace Company, the fine band of the Coldstream Guards to play select airs, and a beautiful display of the fountains, which was to take place at half-past three; but however enchanting such things might be on other occasions, few persons now quitted their places to give heed to them. Everything was looked upon as mere filling up of time, until the one grand actor should step upon the stage.

And this stage was a rope, 170 feet from the ground, from end to end of the centre transept. It was wound firmly round the spiral staircase at each extremity of that great arch, and at frequent intervals along its length weights suspended, like the weights of a clock, and strong cords made fast to the galleries on each side, secured it and kept it steady. It was of the finest hemp and beautifully twisted, was about four inches in circumference, and so long that it descended in spare coils from landing to landing to the lowest galleries. It had been employed before in a longer though not more perilous journey. As stretched along the transept, weighted and tightly drawn, it appeared perfectly even, except toward the ends, where it ascended with a gentle slope for about a dozen yards, to two small platforms which had been erected for the accommodation of Monsieur Blondin and his two assistants. The platforms were raised

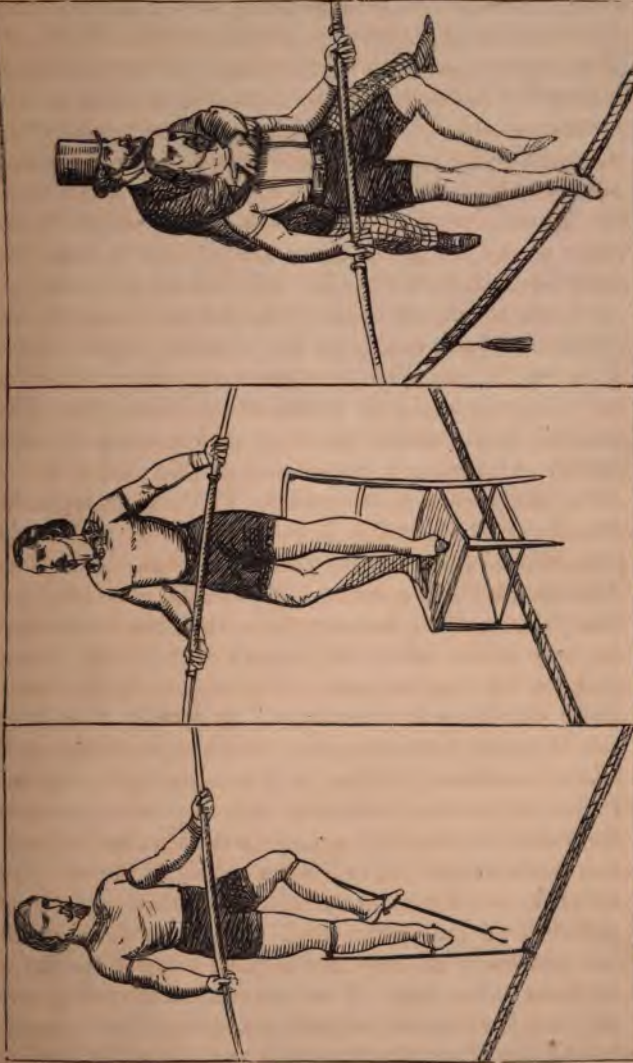


P. 68.

On the High Rope at the Crystal Palace.

about eight feet above the floor of the highest gallery, and round them were clustered several flags. As the hour approached, many thousands of persons (more than half of them ladies) were assembled around the centre of attraction. The floor of the transept for some yards on each side of the rope was kept quite clear—there being nothing softer than the bare boarding to break the fall, should fall there be—but all around it was a dense mass of human beings, whilst the reserved seats on the Handel orchestra, and even the uppermost gallery, to which the price of admission was not less than half a guinea, and from which the best view of the horrible depth below, though not perhaps of Blondin's movements, was to be obtained, had many visitors. At four o'clock, Blondin's assistant at the west end of the transept, waved his flag, the Coldstream band struck up, and all eyes were turned upwards to catch the first sight of the wondrous acrobat. Immediately after, Blondin appeared on the platform next the palace grounds, and was received with applause by his admirers, the vast multitude for the most part preserving silence. He was dressed in the usual style of a rope-dancer, except that, Indian-like, he wore a head-dress of feathers, which appeared heavy, and was by no means picturesque, and displayed two large gold medals on his breast. He held a long red balancing pole in his hands; and now, amidst strains of music, and with the eyes of a vast concourse of people rivetted upon him, Blondin stepped out upon the rope. He walked slowly down the incline, lifting his feet high, and throwing them widely out; but having arrived at the level he ran with some rapidity along until he came to the ascent on the other side, which he walked slowly up, thus accomplishing the passage in the space of two minutes. They were anxious minutes for the spectators, but nothing could exceed the apparent ease, steadiness, and self-possession with which the astounding feat was performed. There was loud applause,

though not nearly so loud or hearty as it would have been for something not so terrible. Having rested a few minutes, Blondin set out again, this time walking backwards down the incline, and having reached the bottom he stood on one leg, placing the sole of his left foot against the middle of his right leg. The applause was repeated, and Blondin again ascended the incline. After a short delay he set out upon the return journey, walking down the incline slowly, but going almost trippingly along when the rope was level, until he came to the middle. He then stooped down, laid his balancing-pole across the rope, sat down much as a lady sits on horseback, rose to his feet, stood upon one leg, then stood on his head perfectly straight, supporting himself on each side with his hands resting on the balance-pole, which was laid firmly across the rope; then resuming a sitting posture, he stretched himself out at full length on his back, and turned a somersault. The people applauded. Blondin acknowledged it by taking off his cap and bowing, then skipped lightly along until he reached the platform. After an interval of a few minutes, Blondin came forth for a new journey, and a new surprise. This time the feathered cap was thrown aside; but instead of it he had drawn a sack over his head, and was setting out actually blindfolded. There were holes in the sack for his arms, so that he was able to use the balancing-pole. And now he descended the incline, cautiously at first, as it were feeling his way with his feet, and trying the firmness of the rope as he proceeded. He seemed to miss his footing for a moment, and a thrill of horror ran through the spectators. Having run along just as before, he sat down in the middle, and then rose and proceeded along the narrow road, occasionally dipping down one foot below the rope, and seeming to tempt the hungry abyss on either side. When he reached his resting-place once more he took off the sack, and showed that beneath it he had on a white bandage, which went round the head and



More Feats on the High Rope.

covered his entire face. The applause became greater than ever. After a short pause he put on the bandage and sack again, and set out upon his return, letting his foot dip down below the rope from time to time as he went along. He lay down upon his back, rose to his feet without the slightest difficulty, ran along till he came to the middle, and then sat down. When taking his seat, the sack being narrow, caught one of his knees but he disengaged himself by two or three vigorous pulls, and took both sack and bandage off, and threw them down below. He next fixed the pole across the rope, and stood upon his head perfectly straight as before, the pole this time gently swaying from side to side. Having sat down again, he stretched himself at full length upon his back and threw a somersault as before. He then got on his legs, and skipped back to the platform. The band now struck up "God save the Queen," and Blondin's terrific performance was over. The whole time occupied by it was less than half an hour.

It would be almost impossible to witness anything so strangely interesting as this performance. There is a sort of fascination, at least for some people, in looking down from a great height. From the topmost gallery the descent must have appeared terrific, and what then was it likely to be when seen from the rope itself? One can hardly help shuddering at the very thought of it, especially when the impression is fresh upon the mind of "fantastic tricks" which the audacious acrobat played over the yawning abyss. 'Twas a sight never to be forgotten. Blondin, however, seemed perfectly at home throughout. He walked, ran, sat, lay down, and rose up again with the utmost ease. He was the only one who seemed perfectly unmoved, for the idea of peril seemed never once to enter his head. There are hundreds who could not bear to look for a moment at such a spectacle, but then there are thousands for whom it would have even a greater attraction than a Handel, a Burns, or a Schiller festival.

As the spectators moved away, various exclamations broke from the lips hitherto sealed in strange silence. "The suspense was too protracted," observed an M. P. to a friend who was hanging on his arm. "Too protracted and too harrowing, at least, for my feelings," answered his friend. "What a wonderful little fellow!" ejaculated the interesting Miss —, "and what a nerve he possesses," rejoined a young gentleman of her acquaintance, who by the bye, had paid rather more attention to a couple of brilliant black eyes beneath a white lace bonnet, than to Blondin on his rope. "I am afraid he'll some day break his neck," suggested one who would have liked to stake a "fiver," on it. "No doubt," answered another, "he'll take the jug to the well once too often." "What countryman do you suppose he is?" inquired an antiquated specimen of her sex, of an old gentleman in blue coat and brass buttons, whose right toe corn was just recovering from an impression made by a boot something smaller in dimensions than a Thames barge. "An American, of course," he replied, "in what other country could you expect such a man to be born?" "Oh, dear ma," screamed out a young lady in her tenth year, "do bring me to see him again;" "and me, and me," quickly responded half-a-dozen more voices. Thus everybody had something to say about Blondin—what he had done, and how he did it—and everybody was pleased, or seemed to be, which is much the same thing. If they were not, their faces belied their feelings.



CHAPTER IX.

"PUNCH" ON BLONDIN.

THE good-natured cynic of Fleet Street, whose pen and pencil have won their way to the hearts of all who can appreciate genial humour in alliance with finished satire, and the functions of the philosopher and the novelist, is not often seen to greater advantage, than when he now and then places himself in opposition to some of his brethren of the Broad Sheet. "Punch," pretty generally takes a comprehensive view of men and things, and hits off the English feeling in most matters to a T. He is rarely offensive, and as rarely unkind to those who deserve any consideration at his hands; or, say rather, at the hands of the public; for, after all, he is only the servant of the public, doing and saying for the public, that the public would have said and done. There is no such reflex of what is revolving in the brain and heart of this country as "Punch." The great organs of public opinion, as they are called, may dart their lightnings, and hurl their bolts at heads crowned and uncrowned, at foreign and domestic laws, manners, and institutions, but one stroke of genuine satire from his pen is worth all their thunder. They cannot write down that which the satirist good-naturedly winks at, on the double score of being

harmless in itself, and a source of harmless amusement to hundreds of thousands. They may call it hard names, and affect a virtuous indignation that it is permitted to lift its head in the broad blaze of day; but hard names break no bones, and virtues assumed count for little.

There has been no higher or more graceful compliment paid to Monsieur Blondin, than is contained in the following article which appeared in "Punch," immediately on the heels of his first performance at the Crystal Palace. To imagine the gruff yet large-hearted oracle of Belt Court, unwillingly surrendering (in his case) a very natural prejudice against the mountebank family; to imagine him so far forgetful of the "dignity of letters," and what was due to himself, as to become one of a holiday throng, intent upon the antics of an ingenious rope-dancer; to imagine him tossing off a tumbler of Scotch ale to the "health of the French acrobat with the American reputation," and then permitting his friend to pay the cab from the terminus to the Temple, is a piece of genuine humour, so thoroughly characteristic of the great English Charivari, and so flattering to Monsieur Blondin, that it would seem to have been intended as a rebuke to those journalists whose sympathies ran adverse to the popular feeling.

JOHNSON AND BLONDIN.

(Extracted from the latest Edition of " Boswell's Life of Johnson.")

"The next day was Saturday, and I called upon my revered friend in the Temple, and after some hesitation I mentioned that I had purchased tickets of admission to the Crystal Palace to see the feats of the French acrobat, Blondin, who was to exhibit that day. I said that I did not know whether I should go or not.

"'Sir,' said Dr. Johnson, 'why do you tell me a lie? You know that you have resolved upon witnessing this Frenchman's exhibition, and the weakness of the desire is less culpable than the cowardice of the mendacity that would veil it.'

"I admitted that I had a curiosity to behold an instance of the power of courage and skill in surmounting difficulties of a grave nature.

"'You are a humbug,' said my venerated friend. 'You care nothing for the fellow's courage or skill, but you have a vulgar desire to go with the multitude, and perhaps a concealed hope that you may be present at a painful catastrophe.'

"I urged that the Prince of Wales, my Sovereign's eldest son, had witnessed the sight, and rewarded the performer with a silver medal.

"My honoured friend became exceedingly angry. 'Do not,' he said, 'drag the name of a member of the Royal Family of these realms (Royal, *de facto*, he added with a murmur to himself) into your miserable plea. The Prince of Wales, in not refusing to join in a Transatlantic holiday, was gracefully discharging an instalment of the duty for which he was accredited to the West. You have no business on Sydenham-hill, and if you had a medal, so far from bestowing it upon Blondin, you would stick it upon your own hat, and repeat the Paoli farce. Let me hear no such nonsense.

"But my character, as is well known, is one of invincible fortitude and pertinacity, and when I know myself to be in the right I am not easily put down. I therefore returned to the charge with courage which almost astonished myself.

"'Pindar sang the praise of horse-racing, Dr. Johnson,' I replied.

"'A horse is not a Frenchman, nor are you a Pindar,'

retorted my revered friend, with that quickness which belonged to him. The lively sally restored his good humour, for he added, 'You are not even a Pindar of Wakefield, though in your heart you despise Goldy's Vicar of that locality.'

"This was unjust; and I told him that though I did not think so highly of Goldsmith's little tale as some did, I was far from despising an elegantly written and moral fable. I then said, 'Dr. Johnson, will you do me the favour to come and see Blondin?'

"He laughed, and said I was putting him to the *experimentum crucis*—which I afterwards thought a most felicitous phrase, because the Frenchman had to 'cross' the transept. I doubt not that I have lost hundreds of equally good things through my culpable negligence of transcription.

"'Why Sir,' he said, 'if you had asked me to purchase a ticket for this sight I should have peremptorily refused, because I am not justified in contributing to bribe a fellow-creature, though only a Frenchman and a mountebank, to risk the loss of his life. But as you have paid for the tickets, and as I shall not repay you, the *onus* is with yourself, and I will accompany you.'

"'We are at the Crystal Palace,' I remarked, as the train entered the station.

"'The building is not of crystal, nor is it a palace,' said my illustrious friend.

"'The name,' I said humbly, 'was given by *Mr. Punch*.'

"'Mr. *Punch* is a great authority,' said Dr. Johnson, removing his hat for a moment, 'and I willingly accept his nomenclature. The fact had escaped me.'

"So ready was he to own an error when it was properly brought before him.

"'Mr. *Punch*,' he continued, 'is most fortunate in selecting denominations. It was he who gave the name of

Arcadia to that new arcaded garden and locality at South Kensington, a name which I observe the journals are all adopting without acknowledgment of the original inventor. But few can so well afford to be robbed, though the wealth of the Bank of England is no excuse to the criminality of the burglar.'

"We proceeded across the beautiful garden, and my revered friend, whose classic recollections were ever ready, pointed to the Mercury on one of the water temples, and remarked that there was a Blondin ready perched. I said, '*Stat in ætænum*,' but was immediately and sternly rebuked by my honoured friend for light use of a word signifying eternity. 'But,' he added, playfully, 'do not be cast down, for you yourself are an everlasting donkey.' This reassured me, and we ascended the gallery and took our seats. Gazing down upon the vast area, on the sides of which and around it were nearly 10,000 persons, Dr. Johnson whispered slyly:

"'Do you think as many persons would come to see *you* supported by a single cord?'

"I felt hurt; for, though I am conscious of many shortcomings, it was wounding to think that the greatest moralist of the age had ever seriously contemplated my coming to be hanged.

"'Do not be a fool,' said Dr. Johnson, kindly. 'You will repose in your Scottish mausoleum, followed by an incalculable array of semi-denuded Caledonian boors; so be happy, and survey mankind.'

"The Frenchman came upon the rope, ran, tumbled, stood on his head, feigned to slip, lay down, walked backwards blindfolded, and performed his other extraordinary gymnastic feats at a height of 180 feet from the floor that had been cleared below. Military music played, the vast assembly applauded, and tears came into my eyes.

"'What are you blubbering for?' said my illustrious

friend. 'Do you envy that poor acrobat his triumph, or do you imagine that you yourself could perform those feats better? In the first alternative the sentiment is unworthy; in the second, the vanity is egregious.'

"Thus did he ever seek to improve my mind and heart, and what do I not owe to him? I told him, however, that he misjudged me, and that I was weeping to think that 10,000 of my fellow-creatures had assembled to derive excitement from the chance of a French mountebank breaking his neck.

"'Spare your tears, and stow your twaddle,' responded my venerable friend. 'They have come for no such savage purpose. They have heard that a person has acquired the art of safely walking on a suspended cord, and they evince a laudable desire to witness a triumph of courage and of skill. Do you degrade poor fellow-subjects to the level of the Roman spectators of gladiator fights? Is there one person in that crowd who would turn up the thumb, if doing so would bring down that acrobat to the floor?'

"I did not dare to remind him that he had summarily crushed my own plea in his chambers, but I asked him whether he would take anything to drink. He was condescending enough to partake of a bottle of Scottish ale with me, and seasoned it by a good-humoured gibe at my selecting liquor bearing the name of my country.

"'The health of the French acrobat, with the American reputation, in a tumbler of Scotch ale!' he said.

"'Drunk by Dr. Johnson,' I ventured to add, 'whose reputation is neither French nor American, nor Scotch nor English, but universal.'

"'You are a thundering humbug,' said my revered friend, smiling. I have reason to believe that he was pleased, for he permitted me to pay the cab from the terminus to the Temple."



Further Feats on the High Rope.

CHAPTER X.

ON THE LOWER ROPE.

IN his first English exposition on the high rope, Monsieur Blondin gave little more than a foretaste of what he could do, and what might be shortly expected from him ; but that little was more than sufficient to confirm all the marvellous accounts which had reached us through the agency of the American press. He was no "sham," puffed into notoriety by unprincipled agents, and mendacious members of the "fourth estate;" but a genuine celebrity, worthy of the glorious building in which he appeared, and of the highest patronage that liberal England could afford. And he had it, as often as he continued to make his bow at Sydenham, until the whole series of his twelve performances was got through—performances varied as they progressed by fresh prodigies of skill and daring ; such, for example, as appearing in the character of a *chef de cuisine*, with cap and apron, table, chair, frying pan, plates and glasses, flour, milk, and eggs, and cooking himself an *omelette a la Soyer*, on one of Walker's Patent Self-feeding Stoves ; walking the rope and turning somersaults in stilts ; carrying a man pick-a-back the entire length of the transept ; and many other exploits of an equally astounding character.

With reference to the last-named feat, a very curious circumstance came under, or rather was forced upon, the notice of the Crystal Palace Directors. It would appear that a report had obtained circulation, to the effect that either Monsieur Blondin or the Directors were prepared to pay a sum of £100 to any person who would submit to the honour of traversing the rope in the manner described. So tempting a bait was not to be resisted; candidates for the vacant post started up as numerous and as suddenly as the fabled army that sprang from the Dragon's teeth; letters by scores and hundreds poured in every day, until that which at first was looked upon in the light of a capital piece of fun, speedily became an unmitigated and intolerable nuisance. The contents, too, of many of the letters, were as wild and absurd as could well be imagined. One correspondent, a "University Man," wanted his life insured for £5000, and an annuity settled upon his children in case he was killed; another, "weary of existence," was eager to avail himself of an opportunity for "shuffling off this mortal coil;" another asked for the money to be "paid down a month beforehand," in order that he might have the satisfaction of spending it himself; a fourth proposed to give Monsieur Blondin £100 if he would "carry his wife over," and £500 if he could manage to "let her slip when about half-way;" a fifth stipulated for a "feather bed" of gigantic dimensions, and any number of tons weight, to be placed under the rope; a sixth required to be provided with a "huge pair of wings," to enable him to take to the air in the event of a mischance; and many others of a like description. Of course, the majority of the writers were only consummate wags, but that numerous really serious proposals were received is no more to be questioned than is the existence of John Bright or Lord Mayor Cubitt. There was but one way of responding to such a vast and varied correspondence, and that was for Monsieur Blondin to carry out the





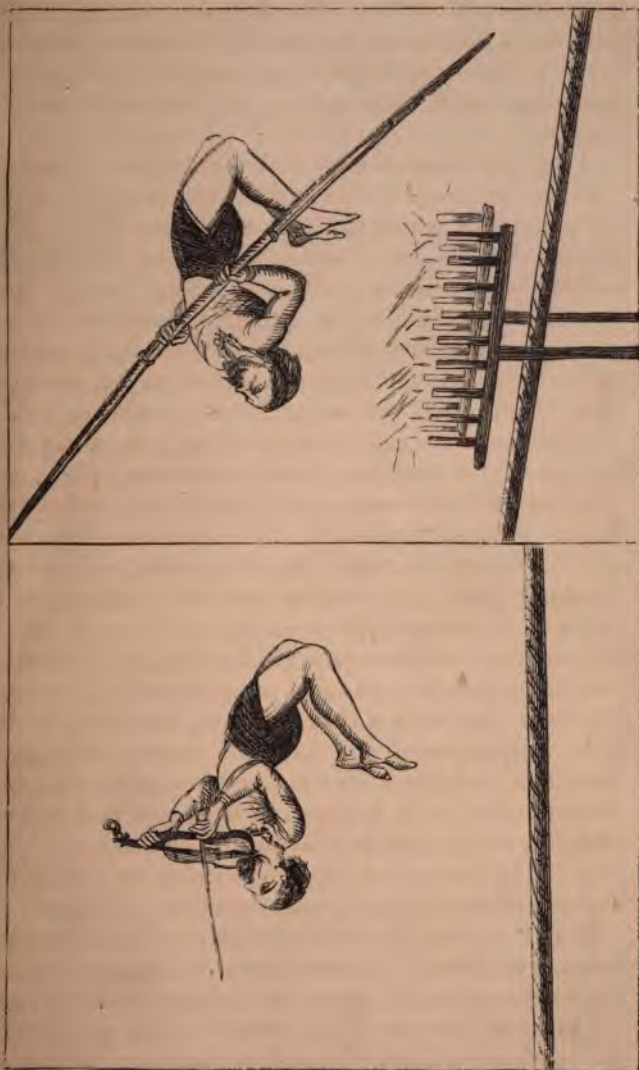
intention he had all along entertained, of having recourse to his own attendant, and no one else. The name of this person is Natale Cavarazioni; he is a native of Italy, was born on the banks of the Lake Como, so exquisitely described by Bulwer Lytton in the "Lady of Lyons," and served for some time as a lieutenant in the army of Garibaldi.

The nett profit reaped by the Crystal Palace Company from Monsieur Blondin's twelve performances reached the enormous sum of £10,000; a tolerably good speculation, it will be admitted, on the part of the Directors. Encouraged by past success, a fresh engagement for a still more lengthened series of exhibitions was entered into; and with the view to enhance, if possible, the public interest on this occasion, Monsieur Blondin undertook to demonstrate that his qualifications as a performer were not limited to dangerous exploits, but that he could deport himself, where danger was out of the question, in a manner to cast all former tight-rope performers entirely into the shade. The fact was, that M. Blondin had, up to now, been looked upon pretty much as a vocalist would be who, by some natural power or instinct, should be able to give out Tamberlik's celebrated *do dièse*, whilst he was ignorant of the elements of music. Those who had only seen him at his fearful elevation had certainly but little notion of what he could do, or how completely he was at home, like Paganini, upon a single string. To do what he had done in public in this country might qualify him very well to get him in the paradise of Mahomet, but it did not prove him to be an artist in his own peculiar line. It was high time for him to convince the public that he could do anything on a rope of which a rope was capable, and accordingly, his low-rope performances proved to be so wonderful that the spectators seemed almost to doubt the evidence of their senses, and to believe that it was a kind of illusion,

and not a matter of fact. The feat suggested in PUNCH's joke about Blondin sticking the ends of his stilts into soda-water bottles—intended as a caricature of American exaggerations—hardly deserved to be compared with the reality.

Fancy a man mounted with his feet on the ends of pitchfork handles, the prongs downwards, and then ascending a rope high in the air, as easy as a Peon or a Guacho would mount a horse, only, instead of bestriding the rope with his legs, he bestrides it with the prongs of his pitchfork stilts; fancy him dancing, cutting capers, turning somersaults, and running up and down inclined ropes, at angles of thirty and forty degrees with his stilt prongs; fancy him playing the march from "Guillaume Tell" on the fiddle, and playing it *à la Vieuxtemps*, dancing all the while to the tune on his rope, and turning the most complicated somersaults, without once stopping his performance—bow-arm, as well as left-hand fingers, going all the time with the steadiness of clockwork and the velocity of steam. In like manner, with a drum which he played with a vehemence and rapidity equal to half-a-dozen drummers, he never missed dancing to time or stopped for a single instant his deafening tattoo, whether turning backwards or forwards, or springing high into the air. The feats with a chair, however, seemed to be the most inexplicable of all. Taking a common four-legged chair, Blondin balanced its legs cornerwise on the rope, and, seating himself upon it, moved it from side to side, as if lounging, stood up on it, climbed over its back, and even edged it by jerks along the cord, without apparently the slightest effort at balancing either the chair or himself.

In all these feats Monsieur Blondin established his reputation as an artiste. His movements, his attitudes, his ease and self-possession, his absence of conventional display, and his apparent mastery of the laws of nature, raised him a thousand per cent. in the eyes of the beholders. It was, on



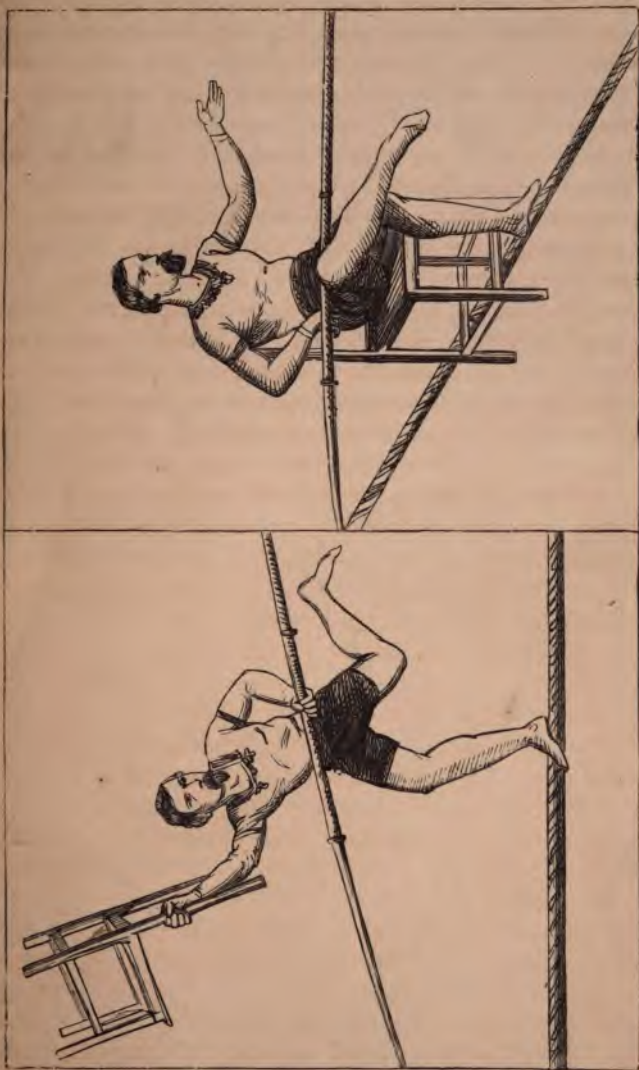
Low Rope Performances.

the whole, the most extraordinary performance that had ever been witnessed there, and from the deep interest taken in it by the spectators, it was, to all intents and purposes, an emphatic denial of the assertion put forth by some newspaper writers, that it was a morbid taste for "sensation" exhibitions alone which led people to go and see Blondin; and that his audience could any day be multiplied twenty, aye fifty fold, by his undertaking to carry Mr. Spurgeon and a dozen charity-school children over the rope, all of a heap, instead of a solitary specimen of the *genus homo*. Flights of this sort are all very well in newspaper paragraphs, but unfortunately they will not stand the test of experience, and no better proof can be given of it, than the reception which shortly afterwards awaited another of M. Blondin's exploits—this time a real "sensation."

The exploit in question consisted in M. Blondin propelling his daughter, Adele, aged five years, along the Rope in a wheelbarrow. That exhibition, though exciting to the highest degree, was quite at variance with the feelings of the English public. There was every disposition to allow Blondin to make capital of his own neck, if he choose, but he was not privileged to expose to risk the life of his child, whom the law of this country holds to be incapable of disposing of herself, and who, if it were not so, could hardly be supposed to have any choice or discretion in the matter. The child herself, like Tell's son, in the famous apple-shooting story, seemed quite unapprehensive of harm; so did Madame Blondin, who looked on very complacently from one of the side galleries; and no doubt if Blondin had been questioned on the subject, he would have gravely assured his interlocutor that there was "no danger." But the English people could not be brought to believe anything of the sort; the Press declaimed against it, legislative interference was clamoured for, and legislative interference

took place. Sir G. C. Lewis placed himself in communication with the Crystal Palace Directors, the Directors conferred with Mr. Coleman, and it was at once determined to acquiesce in the representations made by the Home Secretary.

It is almost superfluous to remark that the intrepid little Frenchman's high-rope performances abated not a jot of their interest from the abandonment of this feature in his programme. People did not, then, go to see Blondin for the mere sake of a "sensation" as if such things were confined to the Crystal Palace; as if we had not "sensation" preachers and writers, "sensation" theatres and concert rooms, "sensation," steamers and exhibitions—all well enough in their respective spheres, yet all liable, like Blondin, to this one objection, that they are out of the common way. Whatever is extravagant or eccentric, is a "sensation." It may be a comet, a curricie, or a crinoline; it may be a Japanese Ambassador, a Sothern, or a Blondin.



Low Rope Performances.

CHAPTER XI.

RIVAL FEATS AND MISADVENTURES.

THAT the most daring feats which men can attempt are pretty certain to challenge a whole host of imitators, some of them possessing all the courage, but not all the skill or good fortune of the originals, an incident which transpired about this time tends to show. Among M. Blondin's numerous spectators on one occasion, was a delicate little woman leaning on her husband's arm. The performance had for her a strange fascination; it was some such example that had lured her also on a perilous walk, for, under the *nom de plume* of Madame Genvieve (her real name is Young), she had made "terrific ascents" at most of the public gardens in the country, and had charmed tens of thousands of people by her grace and intrepidity. "Some day," she said, looking enviously, yet, admiringly at the Hero of Niagara Falls, "some day, I may cross that rope." "She is a brave little thing," said one who knew her well; "she has been on the rope all her life, as her father and grandfather were before her, and can accomplish anything."

In a few weeks, Mr. E. T. Smith, the well known, enterprising, and able successor of Mr. Simpson in the management of Cremorne, inaugurated his second season with an announcement that the "Female Blondin"

would perform the hazardous feat of crossing the Thames on a tight-rope, at an altitude varying from fifty to a hundred feet. As might be expected, tens of thousands of spectators assembled to witness the exhibition; and it was owing entirely to the remarkable presence of mind displayed by the lady acrobat, that they were not eye-witnesses of a terrible catastrophe. When two-thirds of the distance had been accomplished, the performer paused to rest on one of the main supports of the rope, and remained so long in that position that apprehensions of a *contretemps* began to spread. Nor were they groundless, for attempts were began to be made by attendants on shore and in boats to tighten the remaining six or seven hundred feet of rope. It would seem, that for a great part of this formidable length no guy lines were to be seen, and mysterious tales were circulated of some dastardly ruffian having cut the ropes for the sake of the leaden weights, by which the main cord was, or should have been kept steady. After sitting a wearisome length of time on the narrow ledge, on the summit of the timber support, she essayed to advance, but found the task too dangerous to admit of her proceeding. Three quarters of an hour had now elapsed, from the moment that she commenced her perilous undertaking, and all the mellow light had faded from the sky, leaving it cold though tranquil. Again she sallied forth, and travelled the rope some distance further, when she was once more compelled to halt, for the rope was swaying like a garden swing, and was far more in the character of a slack than a tight rope. Loud cries were raised for "a line," and when one was brought, repeated efforts were made to throw it over the rope on which the Female Blondin was manfully exerting herself to preserve her balance. Excitement and alarm were general, for the twilight was deepening, and in a brief space she would be unable to see the rope. Fresh efforts were made to fling cords over the rope, but unsuccessfully, and now a shrill

exclamation arose that she was "going to fall." Suddenly, she let go her balance-pole, which fell splashing into the water, and caught hold with her hands, first the rope, then a couple of weights suspended from it, and next the cords by which that part of the rope was held in perfect steadiness. Descending by the grasp of a three-quarter-inch-cord, or mere whale-line, the gallant little creature reached in safety a boat that had put off to her rescue. The scene, while it lasted, was truly sickening; but it was no sooner over, than the public, relieved from the dreadful feelings of suspense which until now had weighed heavily upon them, gave vent to their admiration of the Female Blondin's nerve and boldness, in loud and long continued bursts of applause. When taken into the boat, her hands were found to be severely lacerated by the line which had opened up to her the way of escape from impending death; yet her only regret, expressed with visible emotion was, that she had not completed her formidable task. The "Female Blondin," subsequently, narrowly escaped death by fire, when similarly engaged at Manchester.

Having referred to the "hair-breadth escapes" of this lady, it is proper to mention, that even the King of Rope-walkers is not wholly exempt from the evils incidental to such a profession, as one or two incidents which occurred during M. Blondin's second engagement by the Crystal Palace Company, are proofs in point. To a man who can walk blindfolded along a rope a hundred feet high, it can matter little, one might think, whether he perform the feat by day or by night—in sunlight or in darkness. But even to him a fog must be a serious discomfort and disadvantage, effectually testing the possibility of his being thrown off his balance by that derangement of nerves generally resulting from the obscuration of the senses. To this severe test M. Blondin was subjected on the occasion of his benefit in the generally bright and mellow month of October. When the

ordinary out-door amusements were at an end, and all eyes were eager to behold the great spectacle of the day, a thick mist that had hung about since the early morning, and woven itself with the twilight into a veil that wrapped every statue, tree and tower in premature darkness, thickened into a dense fog soon after sunset. Blondin had been expected to outdo himself; it was now a question whether he would appear at all. Heavier and fouler grew the vapoury curtain, until faith and hope waxed dim, as the brilliant lights that shone like dying stars far ahead, faintly indicated where the perilous rope towered aloft. 'Will he walk the rope to-night?' anxiously enquired one expectant spectator of another. "I am afraid not," was the rejoinder, and soon the feeling became general that M. Blondin would not appear. Shortly after six o'clock, however, a whisper ran round that he was on the rope, and a display of fire-works at the same instant illuminating the darkness, confirmed the announcement. The band struck up, the fountains played, and the people applauded right vigorously—not because of anything they saw; for M. Blondin, though on the rope, was perfectly invisible—but with a view to encourage the hardy acrobat, whose position began to be regarded with some alarm. For half an hour the only certain token of his presence was the oscillation of two tiny lights along the rope, and thus it was known that he had gone through all his tricks, just as though a summer's sun had been all the while pouring a golden flood of light upon him. The thing seemed incredible; and yet that he had braved that dense fog, was as certain as that he received an overwhelming ovation on making his way back to the mast.

Another incident places the Hero of Niagara in a still more perilous dilemma, but it also shows that his wonderful pluck and presence of mind are equal to any emergency. On the 31st of October M. Blondin was announced to "repeat his extraordinary Benefit Rope-ascension over the





An Exciting Scene.

fountains." At the appointed time he made his appearance at the mast, and having grasped his balancing pole, started off with a nimble and graceful step. By the time he reached the north end of the rope, the different lights had become exhausted, so that all was comparatively dark. After a brief interval the blue lights were again kindled, when Blondin once more set off for the southern mast, which he had no sooner gained than the lights were again extinguished and Cimmerian darkness reigned, the whereabouts of the performer being wholly unknown to the crowds below. Full twenty minutes elapsed, and there was no indication of his presence. A chill fell upon the vast assemblage, and the question began to go round, "Can the poor fellow have met with any mishap?" when suddenly a blue light was kindled, and Blondin was beheld wheeling a barrow, from which he discharged a gorgeous display of fireworks. At this juncture, a thrilling scene was enacted. He was standing with the handles of the barrow in his hands, and his balance-pole resting on the handles; an assistant was stationed on the platform of the south mast to render him any service he might require, and this assistant, as was afterwards ascertained, while in the act of raising the wheel of the barrow from the rope, to enable the performer to wheel it on the platform, by some means or other overbalanced his master, and, in an instant, the pole crashed upon the ground, and Blondin fell head downwards, but cleverly saved himself by clasping the rope with his knee, a feat practised by him so repeatedly and successfully, as to render failure next to impossible. In this position he had to remain for some minutes, however, before he could regain his hold. At length by one of the sudden bounds for which he is so celebrated, he threw himself up, caught the rope in his grip, and stepped on to the platform. Madame Blondin, who witnessed from an elevated situation near, what appeared to her practised eye, even, as the narrow escape of her

husband, was carried away in hysterics, which lasted for some time. The coolness and nerve of M. Blondin himself were perfectly marvellous. But, then, he says he can always save himself with his feet, even if his hands fail him.

A few days after this affair, the Crystal Palace Company gave a signal proof of the estimation in which Monsieur Blondin, and his agent, Mr. Coleman, were held by them. Both gentlemen were invited to a sumptuous banquet, which took place in one of the anterooms of the Palace, and the Hero of Niagara Falls was formally decorated with a gold medal, in token of his courage and talents, being the only gift of the sort offered by the Directors to any individual, since the memorable presentation to her Majesty on the occasion of the opening of the building. There is, of course, a wide gulf between Brunswick's royal line, and Blondin's line, but who shall say that the latter did not merit the distinction conferred upon him? The Directors have good reason to be proud of Blondin, as Blondin certainly has to be proud of them.

A lamentable illustration of Monsieur Blondin's immense popularity with the public, as well as the Crystal Palace Company, made itself apparent about this time. It is not, as is well known, an uncommon thing for women of nervous or sensitive temperament to commit suicide under the influence of a great strain on the mental powers, from disappointed affection, morbid religious enthusiasm, or the bitterness of a great wrong; but could any one for an instant conceive the possibility of any human being throwing away her life because she was not permitted to see an acrobat (albeit the Prince of acrobats) risk his; yet that a woman, and a young one too, not one old and weary of existence, has done so, is a romantic fact not to be disputed, for the records of police-courts, though they may contain much that is startling and uncommon, seldom or never deal in fiction.

Reference is here made to the case of Julia Keating, who was brought before Mr. Woolrych, at the Thames Police Court, in the month of October last, charged with attempting self-destruction in the Regent's Canal. Thomas Moore, a bargeman, stated that he heard a splash in the water, close to the barge in which he was employed on the previous Monday night, and immediately hastened on deck, took up a "hitcher" (a long pole with a hook at one end), and after moving it about in the dark for a short time, saw what appeared to be a woman's bonnet and ribbons above the water. He then got the hitcher under her clothes, kept her afloat, and halloed as loud as he could for help. Assistance was soon given, and he hauled her on shore, with as much care as he was able, and saved her. She was in the water some time, and among the barges, and he was surprised she was not drowned.

Mr. Woolrych, addressing Moore, said: You have behaved very well in the matter, and that woman owes her life to your promptness.

The prisoner in defence, said that she did it in the heat of passion.

The husband of the prisoner here advanced towards the witness-box, and said his wife was rather annoyed with him on Monday, because he went to the Palace without her.

Mr. Woolrych: What palace do you mean?

The Husband: The Crystal Palace. I went there on Monday with a few mates, to see Blondin on the tight rope. She wanted to go there herself.

Mr. Woolrich: To see Blondin?

The Prisoner: Yes, sir. I wanted to see Blondin at the Crystal Palace, and my husband would not take me.

Mr. Woolrych: Well, upon my word, this is a very sad thing. The wickedness of the act you have committed is only equalled by its folly. Under the influence of a dis-

appointment like this you try to sacrifice your own life. I will send you to the House of Detention for a week, where you will receive good advice from the chaplain, and hope you will come out impressed with the sinfulness and folly of the act you have committed.

The Husband: Will you let me take her home now, if you please?

Mr. Woolrych reluctantly discharged the prisoner, and delivered her to the care of her husband. He hoped that she would see the error of her ways.

At the suggestion of Mr. Pyer, the chief clerk, the magistrate ordered that Moore should receive twenty shillings from the poor-box fund.

The worthy magistrate, one would think, might have dived a little deeper into the hidden motive which prompted Julia Keating to attempt destruction, than the one assigned in court, viz., that she "wanted to see Blondin, and her husband would not take her." This was the visible and primary cause, but it is incredible to suppose it more than the lever which put other machinery in motion. We hear nothing of the angry words, or bitter feelings engendered between husband and wife, by the refusal to take her with him, or the nature of that refusal; there might have been unkindness, taunts, and revilings, preceding the rash act, or she might be stung by a sense of injustice, or it might have been her first defeat, working on an irritable and excitable self-willed woman; but surely not disappointed curiosity for such a "sight seeing!"







"Lionising" at Liverpool.

CHAPTER XII.

BLONDIN IN THE PROVINCES.

MR. COLEMAN, Monsieur Blondin's unflagging agent, next turned his attention to the provinces, and was successful in effecting a most lucrative engagement with Mr. John Russell, of London, for a succession of appearances in the principal cities and towns of England. In the course of this tour he appeared at the Botanical Gardens, Sheffield, where ninety thousand persons assembled to witness his ascent; at the famous Aston Hall *fêtes* at Birmingham, in the presence of seventy thousand spectators; and at the Zoological Gardens, Liverpool, where he wheeled a lion over the rope, and found it a tougher job than he bargained for. The Lion, which was eighteen months' old, and was called "Tom Sayers," after the pugilist of that name, was strapped in the barrow. Having adjusted the barrow, Blondin began to move, apparently trembling with the weight of his load. A "guy" rope was attached to the barrow, and as it was let out by his assistant it by some means or other got entangled after he had proceeded some thirty or forty feet. Blondin halted, and the "guy" rope fell to the ground. The heart became sick looking at him. People kept their breath, expecting every moment that the gymnast, with "Tom Sayers" and the barrow would be precipitated into

the "City of Pekin" or into the lake below. Blondin's resolution was taken. He evidently could not go on, and he began to move backward cautiously and slowly. A deep silence prevailed, which was only broken when Blondin landed safely on the platform. Again the barrow was adjusted, and Blondin moved on this time without a "guy" rope. Gradually he reached the centre, and after resting a short time, began to push his load up the incline. The wind seemed to impede him very much, and it was really frightful to see the barrow roll back occasionally about a foot, as if he who was guiding it had not sufficient strength to push it on another inch. He, nevertheless, accomplished the feat.

He was also engaged to appear at Manchester, Derby, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dublin, Belfast, Bristol, Cheltenham, Leeds, Cambridge, Oxford, Dudley Castle, &c., &c., in each of which places he met with the most enthusiastic and unprecedented success, and in some instances the excitement was so intense that the horses were taken out of his carriage and he was drawn in triumph to his hotel by the crowd. At Birmingham, Monsieur Blondin's tight-rope manoeuvres were witnessed from a balloon at an altitude of some three thousand feet, by the famous aeronaut, Coxwell, who furnishes an exceedingly lively description of the same.

"In a park," he says, "where stately trees assumed the diminutive form of gooseberry bushes, and large sheets of water looked like little ponds, and Aston Hall resembled a tiny ecclesiastical model, there was congregated on the right hand slope of the Lilliputian ground an immense swarm of busy bees. A spider's web betwixt two sprigs was spun near them, and a gnat-fly perched on one thread caused the bees to buzz, and move their heads as if prodigiously pleased. The gnat, in moving along, appeared to have the leg of a spider across him, and several times he turned over, which provoked the bees to buzz in good ear-





At Aston Park, Birmingham.

nest, and the humming sound rose higher and higher. At last I saw him cross from twig to twig, and then settle on a bud which stuck out near the top of either twig. Again the morsel presented himself, but this time more like a spider, with his head and body looking grey, as if surrounded by a sort of webbing so as to deprive him of the use of his eyes. His steps, too, were cautious and faltering, and once I fancied he actually fell; but again the bees buzzed tremendously, and I was convinced it was not so. Just as I noticed the spider was approaching the opposite twig, a murky evening puff of vapour intervened, and I betook myself to my own business, by no means uninterested with the singular sight I had witnessed."

This was on the occasion of Monsieur Blondin's first appearance at the once famous seat of the Holte family—that seat which Queen Elizabeth is said to have once honoured with her presence, and which was, later on, visited by the Protector Cromwell in a less ceremonious manner. His next appearance here was attended by an incident which shows how great was the excitement superinduced by his remarkable performances, although it says little for the character of the persons engaged in it. The performance took place, as usual, within an enclosure in the park, and for awhile the best of order was maintained; but only for awhile, as a tremendous crush set in outside the entrance, which the staff of policemen on the spot utterly failed to quell. This crush originated with a mob of "roughs," of the true sledge-hammer type, who attempted to force a passage through the turnstiles at the gates just as it was growing dark, and being repulsed by the police, who were mounted, they broke down the palings and fences, and set fire to them, and, arming themselves with stones and bludgeons, commenced a violent attack upon the police. Several of the constables were severely wounded on their heads and faces by the contact of sharp stones, and a valuable horse,

ridden by a policeman, had its leg broken, and was obliged to be shot. Finding his force quite incompetent to suppress the riot, Inspector Wilson, the officer in charge, despatched a messenger into the town for reinforcements, and Superintendent Legget, in the absence of the chief, sent down by omnibus and train a large number of hastily-collected policemen to the scene of the riot. A large number of the ringleaders were subsequently captured, and the injuries of the wounded policemen were promptly attended to; four of them being very seriously hurt. Seven of the leaders in the riot were taken before the county magistrates, and dealt with according to their deserts. Blondin, therefore, though a perfectly quiet and harmless individual in himself, was unwittingly the cause of an outrage which, looking to the character of the parties engaged in it, might have led to very serious consequences—perhaps another Potato Riot or Bull Ring Burning—had not the authorities succeeded in arresting it as they did.

One little incident ought to be mentioned as having occurred during Monsieur Blondin's visit to the Sister Island, which exhibits the character of the man in a most agreeable light. On the occasion of one of his performances at the Botanical Gardens, Belfast, when just in the act of mounting the rope, contrary to custom, he was observed to hesitate for a moment, and fix his eye intently on the surging sea of faces which thronged the gardens almost immediately beneath him. The movement was so sudden, so earnest, and so inexplicable, as to perplex the spectators, and many a heart throbbed quicker, and many an eye was averted, as the thought flashed like lightning through the assembled multitude, that he had lost his nerve and was about to fall from the giddy height. But it was only for an instant; and the man who seems to "bear a charmed life" was seen gliding in safety and with swan-like ease along the hempen pathway, amid deafening cheers.

The mystery was speedily solved: Monsieur Blondin had recognised in the crowd below, the face of an old and well-beloved friend, associated with many a pleasant reminiscence, and who had once been to him of essential service. He no sooner quitted the rope, and had attired himself in his ordinary dress, than he sought that friend among the crowd, and was grieved to learn that reverses had driven him from his native country—that he was now living in poverty and obscurity. Monsieur Blondin embraced his friend warmly, invited him to his hotel, and, on taking leave of him, pressed into his hand such a pledge of fellowship and good feeling as enabled the poor wanderer to return to America, and begin life afresh in the City of New York. This simple incident, though somewhat romantic, shows that true courage is ever allied to goodness, and that Grimaldi and Belphegor were not the only members of their order who possessed “a heart that could feel for another.”

It is the misfortune of public men, more particularly men like Monsieur Blondin, to suffer at times from errors of the press, a collection of the more malignant type of which might fairly take its place in the elder D'Israeli's “Curiosities of Literature.” Bayle records several very curious specimens; among others, an advertisement of a sermon, by a celebrated divine, on the “Immortality of the Soul,” and the announcement of a work entitled the “Lies of the Poets,” which, if well and faithfully done, should form a very comprehensive work. The vicinity of “Lives” and “Lies” is, indeed, most dangerous, a single letter more or less making a lie of a life, or a life of a lie. The word glory, for the same reason, is liable to a like mischance. The dropping of a liquid changing that imposing dissyllable from glory to gory. What is treason, once asked a wag, but reason to a *t*? which *t* an accident of the typographer may at any moment displace with the most awkward and ludi-

crous effect. Imagine some great historical character impeached for reason, or reasonable practices. The thing seems absurd on the very face of it, and yet nothing is more likely. Misprints, it is said, are reducible to laws, a point into which it is not necessary to go; but this is pretty certain, that they more frequently than not fall upon the tenderest part of a person's writing, and where there is a possibility of destroying a vital meaning. It was so on one occasion with Monsieur Blondin. He was engaged to perform at a fashionable watering-place in the West of England, and amongst other great feats which were expected of him, it was announced that he would appear on the rope with an "Elephant's Cooking-apparatus," and partake of luncheon of his own preparing. The unfortunate line in the placards which gave rise to such extraordinary expectations on the part of his audience, should have read, an "Elegant Cooking-apparatus;" but although elephants in modern days, whatever they may have been of old, are not proverbial for possessing a knowledge of gastronomy, much less for being equipped with patent cooking-stoves; he was literally expected to perform the feat in question, and a portion of his audience grew clamorous and went away in high dudgeon, not to say disgust, when he mounted the rope with an ordinary cooking-stove attached to his back.

The force of prejudice, in some minds, is subversive of all the conditions upon which society hangs together. It is its own law-maker, and there is no appeal against its decrees. Whilst Monsieur Blondin was adding to his fame in the "Land of Burns," a gentleman in Glasgow, remarkable for his enterprise, and deeply interested in the welfare of the charitable institutions of the city, proposed to a few private individuals to engage the celebrated rope-walker for a performance in aid of the well-nigh exhausted funds of a valuable local institution. The idea was approved of by all, save one, who objected to it on the score that no institution

could prosper long together which received assistance from "travelling mountebanks."

"Gently, friend," responded the gentleman. "Mountebanks, as you call them, have been spoken respectfully of by learned men, and men of blameless life, in all ages; have enjoyed the acquaintance and friendship of some who figure prominently in the history of the world; and if any body of persons might claim consideration at the hands of their fellows on the score of the simplicity of their rule of life—the energy and perseverance they exhibit in overcoming natural obstacles—the amount of severe labour they incur in earning their daily bread, or the alacrity with which they minister to the pleasure of others, regardless, in many instances, of their own true interest, it is that very class whom you affect to despise."

"But they are not a useful class," replied the objector.

"The story of their lives," urged the gentleman, "might be found to teach grand lessons of patient self-dependence, if you would condescend to read it; of disappointments and reverses borne with heroic fortitude; of suffering, and privation endured without anger, and without repining. But does it follow that because a man is not a hedger or a ditcher, a hewer of wood or drawer of water, his vocation is therefore unprofitable to the state? Clearly, this was not Beckman's opinion, and an opinion such as his is entitled to respectful attention."*

The gentleman was right; and although he did not carry his point, and make Monsieur Blondin the humble instrument in benefiting a noble but languishing charity, he succeeded in silencing his opponent, and that was something.

All our political economists tell us, as a fundamental principle of government, that population ought to be increased. This maxim, however, is only just under certain

* Author of the "History of Inventions and Discoveries."

circumstances; that is, when employment can be ensured to a greater number of inhabitants than a country already possesses. Of beggars we have to maintain too many. All our trades and occupations are not only filled up with workmen, but overflow. Our farmers can employ no more labourers, and our manufacturers no more hands than they have at present: our army and navy are full, and in every other employment there are more candidates, and more supernumeraries, than is consistent with the good of the public. Ought it not, then, to give us pleasure when necessity invents new means of acquiring a livelihood; more particularly when the idea conceived turns upon lightening the cares and anxieties, by beguiling the leisure hours of those who labour hard with hand and brain in the rough every-day work of the world?

A good broad grin is a good thing, and honestly worth all that we can afford to pay for it. "Sir, sir," exclaimed an earl's young son to the illustrious Mr. Widdicombe, who was horse-whipping a clown with well-simulated severity in the ring at Astley's, "you mustn't hurt that poor man; he makes me laugh." That speech, honourable in every way to him who gave utterance to it, is the mountebank's letters-patent of nobility. He has won his golden spurs in the sawdust—he is of use in society—he has a mission, and may both be seen and read of with interest and advantage.

The lyric poets of this age are pretty generally among the first to pay becoming tribute to remarkable qualities in mankind. There is no public man or woman, of any description, for a quarter of a century past, that they have not sung of after some fashion. Be he a prime minister, a popular preacher, a horse-tamer, or a rope-dancer, it is all the same to our ephemeral bard. Monsieur Blondin has had his share of "lionizing" in this way, and the following humorous epistle, addressed to him by a writer, not un-

known in connexion with our popular literature, and since set to music by Mr. R. Flemin Lowell, reached him by post one morning, in the course of his provincial tour.

Of all the sights in England now,
And I've looked everywhere,
There is not one, of any sort,
With Blondin can compare;
He is the marvel of his age—
That every one admits—
So, *fit* it is that he should beat
All others into *fits*;

The world counts seven wonders up,
An eighth I will instal,
The Hero of Niagara,
And greatest of them all.

Though small in stature, slight in build,
With truth it may be said,
He's never *undersized* but when
You see him *overhead*,
A tripping of his own *accord*,
Like some fantastic elf
To whom is given *rope* enough
But *not* to hang himself.

The world counts seven wonders up, &c.

When he the foaming *rapids* crossed,
And first achieved renown,
So *rapidly* his fame *went up*
On all *hands* it *went down*;

The people *clapped*, and cried "hurrah!"
With all their soul and strength
To see so *short* a traveller go
To such an awful *length*.

The world counts seven wonders up, &c.

A prodigy of daring is
This gallant little soul—
By *birth* a Frenchman, but in *race*
Inclining to a *pole*:
It makes one's hair stand all on end,
While every heart-pulse beats,
To see his *little legs* perform
Their very *mighty feats*.

The world counts seven wonders up, &c.

We frequently hear sailors boast
The years they've crossed the brine,
But who with Blondin can aver,
As oft he's *crossed the line*;
And crossed it, too, in storm and calm,
When winds blew hard or soft,
So that whatever weather *fell*,
He still was up *aloft*.

The world counts seven wonders up, &c.

His culinary powers are put
To an eccentric use,
Because though *omelettes* he'll *cook*,
He wont *cook* his own *goose*;

And, then, he's ne'er in liquour, save
 When he's in *sack*, or lunch
 Is followed, or preceeded by
 A barrow full of *Punch*.

The world counts seven wonders up, &c.

Of Blondin, more I fain would *sing*,
 But, *ten* to one you'd say—
 Those *base* notes drop, and leave him to
 The *tenor* of his way.
 When next a *cataract* he dares,
 May I be there to see
 Both what he does, and how he fares,
 But no *catastrophe*.

The world counts seven wonders up, &c.

CHAPTER XIII.

BLONDIN ON FOUR LEGS.

M. Blondin's next engagement at the Crystal Palace was at Christmas last, when the programme of amusements provided for holiday visitors embraced (among other attractions) a pantomimic drama of exciting interest, from the fertile pen of Mr. Henry Coleman, in which the Hero of Niagara enacted the part of an Ape. The piece was entitled "*The Child of the Wreck.*" It was produced on a newly-erected and elegantly-appointed stage in the centre transept, and to witness it, the entire floor of the transept, the Handel orchestra, and the galleries above, were thronged with spectators.

Mr. Fenton, of the Haymarket Theatre, was the scenic artist, and opened the series of pictorial illustrations with a wreck scene, in which Don Fernando, the proprietor of a Brazilian plantation, witnesses the wreck of a vessel that contains his wife and child on a voyage to England. He is, however, not an idle spectator of the catastrophe, for by his well-timed efforts, and endangering for the moment his own security, he succeeds in saving his wife. He remains in doubt concerning his child, but has serious misgivings that it has fallen a victim to the merciless element. Happily for him, and for the child, this is not the case. The



Blondin on Four Legs.

child has been rescued by a faithful Ape, who preserves it in a cavern, and tends it with sagacious and exemplary care. Like all such animals the Ape is but an ape, and is guilty of monkey tricks, which, being mischievous, excite the revenge of the neighbouring peasantry. One of these, named Sam, waylays the unfortunate and misappreciated animal, and tracks him to a grotto where the child is concealed. The misunderstood preserver of a superior race is shot; but in its last struggles the poor Ape does not forget its innocent charge, which it brings forth exultingly and restores to its astonished parents, and then dies, as if satisfied with having done its duty, surrounded with astonished groups of unthankful men. Such a conclusion is intensely satirical, and breathes an irony too deeply seated for mere burlesque.

M. Blondin manifested mimetic powers of the highest order in the various contortions and antics, with which he portrayed the sympathetic, self-sacrificing, and ill-compensated ape. He was careful, too, to preserve the true and natural resemblance by a skilful dramatic make-up, which was satisfactory to all who witnessed the marvellous exhibition; whilst apart from the drama, he performed some extraordinary professional feats, still in the character of the Ape, which demand a suitable record. Now he might be seen crawling along a tight rope from the summit of the stage to the termination of the adjoining gallery; and then, taking hold of another rope suspended from the roof of the transept, he swung himself over, in the manner of Leotard, to the opposite gallery. Here he caught a third rope, by which he slipped down among the spectators; and, in the same manner, he afterwards fled or leaped on to the stage.

A writer in *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, who witnessed the performance, supplies a most interesting account of his impressions at the time, under the title of

"BLONDIN AND THE MONKEY."

"The activity and courage of the performer," he says, "are truly something marvellous; but yet he partially defeats his own object, for his face, mischievous tricks, and the skin he wears, render him so like a real monkey, that people do not expect anything *but* excessive activity from the creature before their eyes. Were he to perform the same tricks in his ordinary exercising dress, the effect would be much heightened.

"There have of late been great disputes relative to the difference between the man and the monkey. Here, then, is a man acting the part of a monkey; and I was most curious to see how human anatomy would disport itself in the performance of feats peculiar to an animal whose habitat is in trees. On the whole, I felt some complacency as a *homo* at the marked difference between the two animals—human and non-human. Imprimis—a monkey being quadrumanous, or four-handed, always prefers to make progress (whether he be going slowly or swiftly) upon all four members, and he never stands erect except upon special occasions, and those rare ones: walking on two legs is not his natural mode of going. Blondin, on the contrary, being bimanous, or two-handed, naturally elects the upright mode of walking: anything else is difficult to him; and when he has to advance or run away, he has to do it rather more like a man than a monkey.

"When Blondin *does* walk upon 'all-fours,' his gait is very different from that of a monkey; he is obliged to walk upon *the toes* of his feet, the heels being erect in the air, and upon the palms of his hands, the thumbs being stretched well away from the fingers. The real monkey walks with the whole of the sole of the foot, heel and all, flat upon the ground, the great toe (or thumb) being separated from the

toes. The four digits of the hand are *parallel to one another*—the very converse of Blondin's case. In fact, one of the great distinctions between a man and a monkey is, that the man has a thumb opposable to the top of each of the other digits; and upon this apparently insignificant fact is founded much of his superiority over all other animals. The monkey's thumb is *not* opposable to the other digits; but, as if to compensate for this, his great toe takes the office of a thumb, and is of the greatest use to him in holding on to branches during the act of climbing. If a gorilla were to walk over Blondin's tight-rope, it would be seen by the spectators below that he would grasp the rope with his great toe. Blondin's anatomical construction will not allow him to do this; he walks, therefore, upon the sole of his foot, sustaining himself by the comparatively feeble grasp of the curve of the foot, and by a nice management of his centre of gravity, which gives him the appearance of walking so much from the hips. The great toes can, however, be trained to grasp; and there is a poor man in London streets who gains his living by writing with his toes; still, no living man or woman will ever be able to vie with the monkey, as far as grasping with the great toe is concerned. Barefooted sailors come nearest to the animal in this respect. Watch a monkey go up a pole; you will see he places his hind feet on the surface of the pole, at a considerable angle to his body (which anatomy enables him to do), and thus he ascends. Watch Blondin; his feet cannot be turned inwards like the monkey's. The complicated ligaments of the ankle, made to support an erect frame, will not allow it; he has therefore caused small wooden steps to be nailed on to his pole, which exactly resembles the bear's pole at the Zoological Gardens. In fact, Blondin goes up his pole much like our friend Ursa Major, to whom, as regards the structure of the foot, Blondin approaches more nearly than he does the monkey. The

bear is a genuine plantigrade, so called because he possesses the faculty, from the structure of the sole of his five-toed foot, of rearing himself up on the hind feet. Blondin, therefore—unwittingly, no doubt—has arranged his climbing pole to suit his plantigrade structure.

“A merry little child just in front of me at the Crystal Palace, at first was half-frightened at Blondin, thinking, in her infant mind, he was a real monkey; and when assured by her father that this was not the case, she wisely questioned his answer by the observation: ‘Why, papa, he has not a mite of a tail.’ True, Blondin has no tail; and I would venture to ask the Directors of the Crystal Palace what species of monkey M. Blondin represents—whether a monkey of the Old World, or a monkey of the New World? The monkeys of the New World have prehensile tails, a species of fifth hand; and, what is very extraordinary, the non-prehensile tailed monkeys when feeling unwell, gnaw and devour the tips of their tails; whereas those of the New World, knowing the disadvantage that would thence accrue to them, do *not* gnaw their tails. Blondin would find it difficult to make an artificial prehensile tail, worked by human mechanism; he has, therefore, wisely dropped the subject, and we must assume that he performs in the character of an Old World monkey.”

“His pluck and courage in performing his jump of one hundred and twenty feet are really marvellous. Ascending to a high platform on one side of the transept of the Crystal Palace, in front of the stage, he holds on to a rope fastened securely above, and, letting himself go with a spring, swings right across the transept to the opposite side. It is as though you hauled up the great brass chandelier of Westminster Abbey into the organ loft, and let it swing bodily up towards the reading eagle, under the centre of the great tower. I was curious to see how Blondin would *land* from his aerial journey, as his impetus would be too great to

allow him to lodge on a platform. An eagle or other large bird, stopping suddenly in his flight, has his wings to help him in bringing him up on a given point; not so Blondin: for the moment, he converts his body into a pendulum, it is a dead heavy weight, and his physical force, therefore, is greatly inferior to the dead weight of his body acting under the laws of gravitation. A monkey in a natural state, free and wild in the forest, is no fool; he won't go and jump bang on to the trunk of a tree, a hard, firm, and inelastic substance—he is much too clever for that. He jumps on to a bough, which is elastic, bending, and pliant, and gives time for muscular force to overcome gravitating force. We don't often see monkeys wild in the English woods, but we do see a very monkey-like animal in every respect. The pretty little squirrel jumps not from trunk to trunk, but from bough to bough. Blondin has instinctively arrived at the same conclusion as nature did when she made the monkey and the squirrel, and he has therefore arranged a thick rope, which would represent a bough, in front of the platform, where he arrives at the end of his swing; in fact, the arrival platform looks like a large cage with one thick bar. When about to start, he fixes his eye on the bar, and then away he goes with a most magnificent eagle-like swoop, as near flying as it is possible for human flesh and blood to arrive at; and when he feels himself near the end of his tether on the opposite side of the arch he has described, he stretches out his legs, and grasps in an instant the single bar of his cage.

“This rope-bar being fixed, ‘gives’ to his force more or less: once having a hold with his legs, the rest is easy; he poises himself for a moment, holds on by one hand, and lets go the swinging rope which has carried him safely across with the other. This seems all very easy on paper, but I do not think it is very easy in practice, for the day I saw him, the long swing-rope became entangled in his foot, and

it was with difficulty he got it free again. I heard subsequently that a few days after he missed the rope on to which he swings—he was not quite quick enough to catch it with his feet, and away he went right back again into open space; for if human beings will convert themselves for the time into pendulums, they must submit to the laws which govern pendulums, and not human beings. Missing his hold, therefore, away he swung back again, but not with sufficient force to reach the place whence he started; he swung short of it, and back and back again, oscillating to and fro in mid-air for some minutes. It was impossible for him to recover sufficient force to reach either side; he was physically on the horns of a dilemma. There were only two ways of escape—one downwards, one upwards. Downwards he could not go, the drop on the ground was too great; upwards he might go, as he still held on to the rope. There was no question that this was the only road open for him, so therefore, up he went—up, up—till he should meet with a friendly cross-road which would conduct him home. On to one of the side-ropes he therefore transferred himself, and arrived in safety, amid the cheers of the visitors, at the same platform whence he had started."

CHAPTER XIV.

BLONDON AS HE IS.

THERE are men whose character can be gleaned in an instant from their *physique*, and Monsieur Blondin is certainly one among them. To form a full and clear idea of him it is necessary to do something more than pertain to phrenology or physiognomy alone. The general cast of his organisation must be looked at, for it is that, and not any one faculty in particular, which makes Blondin what he is; not that the brain does not play its part in the business, and an important part, too; but no brain without a physical structure akin to his could by any possibility put forth such extraordinary sustaining power as he has displayed.

The structure and texture of his organization are in excellent keeping with the natural law which governs the fitness of things; hence the phenomena he has manifested are in strict accordance with the physiological laws that regulate the manifestations of the mind and physical action, He has a fine, compact, elastic body, giving great strength and power with little bulk in proportion, his height not being more than about five feet five inches, and his weight about ten stone. The absolute volume of his brain is large in proportion to the size of his general system. The forma-

tion of his head indicates a well-balanced brain. The organs of concentrativeness, constructiveness, combativeness, imitation, size and weight, are large. Cautiousness and the reflective organs are also highly marked. This combination gives cool courage, boldness, circumspection, and calm judgment, and unity of action of the various organs of the brain and general system.

The character of his face is also very remarkable, and corresponds in every way with the development of his brain. The eyes, which are small, and placed very near together, denote quickness and determination. There is an amplitude of forehead, and the nose is well and distinctly defined. It is stoutly maintained by many that the nose is the index of the man, but it is difficult to furnish any precise standard of nasal perfection. Tastes differ. The Chinese are given to short thick noses, Hottentots, to flat ones, Kalmucs to dumpy snubs, Jews to aquiline. In Europe we usually accept the Grecian nose as the highest type. Large noses have often characterised great men—not physically great men, but those who achieved greatness. Cæsar, and Achilles, and Cromwell had all large noses—so had Wellington. This may account for Napoleon's expression, "Give me a man with a good allowance of nose." Monsieur Blondin is by no means deficient in this respect. His nose is of the ordinary type, but there is one very peculiar curve in it which signifies purpose and capability. As much of his mouth and chin as can be seen, evinces resoluteness and a contempt for danger, but the lower part of the face is garnished with a quaintly cut beard and moustache, which impart to the features a most singular expression. Altogether, his physiognomy is fixed as a sphinx, and has a stony look about it which seems incapable of change or surprise. Had Blondin not been the King of Rope-dancers, he must still have been a marked man—a great general, traveller, inventor, or something of the sort, as he is as much above

the ordinary stamp of men, as the mountain pine in a Far West forest is above our English poplar.

Many persons labour under the impression that Blondin's feats upon the rope are dangerous; so they are, but not to him. He is as much at home on the rope as the squirrel is in its gambols from tree to tree, and the *rationale* of the thing is this; he has perfect confidence in his own sense of touch and balance, and he never looks beneath him. That being so, it is quite immaterial whether he be elevated one yard or one mile from *terra firma*. He looks in a fixed manner, and always above him. He is guided by his feet. When, therefore, he is blindfold, he is deprived of a sense which is of no use to him—which may indeed prove a source of danger. When the droop of the rope at Niagara was forty feet, and he was at the bottom of the curve, he could scarcely avoid seeing the ends of the rope, and that was a source of danger to him. If he were to look down we know not what might happen to him, but we may guess from what happened at Belfast, and from a painfully memorable accident which occurred some time ago.

At the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle, a certain German acrobat, by name Kolter, performed before the allied sovereigns. He was the Blondin of his time; and judging from the reports of him which have been handed down to us, was a worthy predecessor of this modern marvel. He walked along a rope stretched from the cathedral to some neighbouring buildings; turned somersaults upon it, and came down amid a shower of fireworks. His guerdon was, like his audience, royal; and he was hailed King of Acrobats. But a few years afterwards this man was performing at Bonn. This time the rope was not stretched at a very great height. It was (if I remember rightly) but forty-five feet from the ground. Presently a shout arose in the crowd—a woman had fainted, or some such event. Kolter looked down for a moment—fell over, and broke his neck.

It is to be hoped that no such fatality may ever befall Monsieur Blondin, who, on the score of prowess belongs to the same class as Balmat and other Chamounix guides. It is true the Alpine adventurers do not travel blindfold—nor after dark, if they can help it; but is it not written of one William Deloraine, that—

Through Solway sands, through Tamar's moss,
Blindfold he knew the paths to cross.

And when the road which Blondin takes is perfectly straight, the seeming danger incurred is no doubt very much mitigated. Still, he is a marvellous example of what the human mind and body can be trained to undergo when properly disciplined; and certainly, in this respect, if in no other, the conduct of the Crystal Palace Directors in providing amusements for the People, in the People's own Temple, of a character that contrast favourably with other species of national enjoyment, calls for anything but censure at the hands of the Press, or the public.

Society is sometimes fastidious to a degree without being able to assign one rational ground for it, forgetting that many things seemingly objectionable in themselves, may yet be capable of teaching valuable lessons to those who are willing to receive them. We object to things, more from a general habit of objecting, than anything else, and in so doing we are both guilty of an injustice to our reasoning faculties, and affix limits to the extent to which the varied powers of the human mind and body can be improved. It is now felt that the bluff old sage of Bolt Court was too severe upon his flying philosopher of the happy valley, and for the honest reason that satire has frequently done much towards retarding the progress of science and useful inventions. Galvani, Franklin, Jenner, Harvey, Watt, Stephenson, Fulton, are all cases in point. How they were severally laughed at, spat upon,

mauled and mobbed in their day! It is manifestly wrong to depreciate any process or experiment, and though we, with our limited powers of diving into futurity, can see no grand object in store which rope-walking is likely to accomplish, far be it from any one to say that Blondin's displays may not, by-and-bye, when compared and collated with our constantly increasing knowledge respecting the nature, expansion, and adaptation of physical and muscular forces, lead to a great improvement of the human being, as standing at the head of the mundane creation. This, again, could not take place without a corresponding salutary effect on the nervous system, and, of course, the functions and organs of the brain.

There is yet something more, too, in the vocation of a man like Blondin which ought not to be lost sight of, and that is the temperate habits which it of necessity inculcates. It is related of Garrick, that when acting he used to drink nothing but water-gruel. His *Romeo* averaged four pints; but for the curse in *King Lear*, he has been known to take as much as three quarts in one evening. When he performed the "walking gentleman," however, he preferred a glass of ginger-beer, with the white of an egg in it. The rule of Garrick's life in this respect, no doubt, largely contributed to his enviable position on the British boards; and the same remark will apply with equal truthfulness and force to M. Blondin. When engaged in his profession, chocolate is the only beverage which he consumes, and even of this he partakes very sparingly. No matter the arduous nature of the task required of him, a cup of chocolate is his only stimulant; so that he is in his way as useful and effective an expounder of the great temperance principle as the American orator, Gough; the modern Hogarth, George Cruikshank, "or any other man."

It were quite impossible that Monsieur Blondin could be what he is, and do what he does, in the absence of rigid

abstinence. Temperance is strength. Among the Arabs, the Persians, and the Turks, we do not meet with those undersized, rickety, consumptive beings, who are so common in Europe; we do not meet with such pale, wan, sickly-looking countenances; their complexions are bright and florid, they are strong and vigorous, able to ride a hundred miles a day, and capable of performing feats which our professed *athletæ* would not be able to do. "I remember," says the late Mr. Silk Buckingham, the well-known traveller, "I remember seeing a most striking instance of their powers. A band of men from the Himalaya mountains had come to Calcutta for the purpose of exhibiting feats of strength, and they were, indeed, perfect Samsons. Their size struck me with admiration. I know nothing that I can compare to them; but perhaps some of you have seen the statue at the bottom of the stairs at Somerset House—it is Hercules leaning on his club, is about seven feet high, and looks like a being capable of executing the most difficult task—and such men were these *athletæ*. We selected five men on board the Glasgow frigate, a similar number from one of the regiments, and likewise from an Indiaman, all fine picked men, and yet upon a trial of strength it was found that the Himalaya mountaineers were equal to two-and-three-quarters of the strongest Europeans. They could grasp a man and hold him in the air like a child, and if they had not been under control, I am convinced they could have crushed him to death. I felt them, and I never felt such flesh in my life—it appeared rolls of muscle; and yet none of these men had ever tasted spirits. I do not say that drinking water was the cause of this, but it serves to prove that abstinence from intoxicating drinks is perfectly compatible with the possession of great bodily power."

The mere movements of Monsieur Blondin from one part of the kingdom to another of themselves afford an ample

illustration of his power in resisting fatigue, to say nothing of his extraordinary performance at each place he visits. He has been known to appear one day in Dublin, and the next in Glasgow; the next afternoon at Liverpool, and the same evening at Manchester; the next day at Bath and Clifton; the next in Birmingham; the next in South Wales; on the next day but one (Sunday intervening) at Manchester again, and afterwards at Halifax, York, Leeds, Hereford, Glastonbury, Derby, and Woolwich. On the following Monday, after another day's rest, he has started off again, and traversed not less than a thousand miles in that week, and so on the next week, and the week following that, just as though his physical capability increased more and more, the more it was put to a resolute test. Monsieur Blondin has never yet attempted anything in the shape of a pedestrian feat. Should he ever contemplate making a venture in that direction, it will be an unfortunate thing for Deerfoot and the dozen other gallant performers who have successfully and unsuccessfully contended against him in different parts of the country. They will all be compelled to resign their honours straightway. Not one of them all will be able for an instant to cope with this famous athlete.

Many a member of the plumed and spangled fraternity, disregarding the rule by which alone greatness can be achieved, and falling into habits that are inconsistent with pecuniary success, becomes wretchedly poor, is neglected by his fellows, falls into vice and disease, and dies a miserable example of improvidence and shame ere half the allotted days of mortals are numbered. On the other hand, there are those who, by thrift and decorum, have managed to raise themselves from the streets to be the possessors of wealthy homes, handsome carriages, and votes for the county. Some among us may remember having seen Belzoni, as the "Patagonian Samson," taking up heavily-

encumbered kitchen-tables by his teeth, and bearing paving-stones to be shattered on his breast by sledge-hammers, long before they heard of him as an explorer in ancient Egypt, or read the modest narrative of his explorings. So, years previously to that in which Rachel was seen queening it in her palace in the Rue Tridier, she had been seen, a fragile child, standing on a yard-square of old carpet, in the Champs Elysées, reciting snatches of classical tragedies to the harsh accompaniment of an old woman who could (not) play on the violin. Half of the old proprietors of the cheap booths in our fairs, when we were a fair-going people, realised handsome fortunes, the foundations of which were laid on the hard stones of the streets of London, or of other large cities. Instances there are of persons who, having failed in other walks of life—honourable walks of life—authors and artists—have taken to “tumbling,” and done well at it. Mr. Nelson Lee, a gentleman who has written a greater number of dramatic pieces than Calderon, De Vega, and M. Scribe, put together—a member of a good family, was once compelled, by the same influence which drove Ruy Blas into livery, to go down into the streets with a brother and there win bread by a series of open-air performances, the profits of which soon lifted the two partners out of the kennel, and set one at least on the road to fortune, honestly achieved, of the origin of which its architect is in no wise ashamed, and which may he long enjoy!

As regards the large sums of money which M. Blondin is making by his performances, and which have been erroneously asserted to exceed what was paid to the Swedish Nightingale in the zenith of her fame; he is a sort of parallel to the famous Maddox, who, eighty years ago, astonished all the world by his wonderful power of balancing himself under extreme difficulties. Leigh Hunt, speaking of him, sets down his income at the rate of £11,000 for a

single season, being £2,500 more than David Garrick ever made in one season during the most prosperous days of the British drama. One of Maddox's great feats was tossing a straw, and causing it to alight on any part of his body he chose; and his biographer reports that he did this at the rate of twenty guineas a time! "Head of Fo!" exclaims Leigh Hunt; "what would Confucius have thought of it?" And pray what would Confucius think of M. Blondin receiving from an enterprising gentleman in London the sum of *fifteen thousand guineas for two hundred performances* on the tight rope! It is nevertheless a fact; and M. Blondin drives his carriage and pair, and occupies a handsome mansion at the West End.

But, then, the rope-dancer who, as has been shown, is an old favourite with the British public, has always had a higher value set upon his services than many others who were equally, if not still more, deserving. To afford a sample of the relative amount of state patronage vouchsafed to poets, stage-players, dancers, and rope-walkers, in the time of Henry the Eighth, of questionable or blessed memory, amongst the records kept in the Chapter-house in Westminster are the following entries, as having been made by that monarch:—"To Newark, for making a ballad, 1d.; to a Welshman for making a rhyme, 2d.; to a tumbler on the rope, 3s. 4d.; to a young maiden for 'dauncing,' £12 a night (a sum equal to £106 of the present money); to my Lord Oxon, for being jocular, 3s. 3d.; and 2s. 2d. a piece to minstrels from France, including their travelling expenses." It will thus be seen that next to the Cerito or Taglioni of that day, the highest sum of money paid by a king of England to any public performer, on the occasion of a great state entertainment, was received by a lucky rope-tumbler.

Good fortune is the ruin of some men, as misfortune is a means of destroying others. It either leads them to ex-

travagance and excess, or else it turns their brains, and they become the victims of some terrible monomania. Take for example Mr. E. P. Christy, the original negro minstrel, who lately attempted to commit suicide, by jumping out of the second story window of his residence at New York. His history is a singular one. He made the first great success of the African Opera. He was from Buffalo—a rough in that place, with a good voice; he got up a company of singers. He picked up a boy named George, to whom he gave his name, and he made it famous as George Christy. Succeeding so well in Buffalo, Ned Christy determined to try a larger field, and went to New York. Here he was almost drowned with success. Crowds thronged his place nightly, and hundreds were turned away because there was no room. He coined money, and was enabled to sport diamond breastpins and rings worth 5000 dollars. Women fell in love with him. He was the rage. He bought carriages, owned John Brougham's theatre, kept race-horses, bought heavily in stocks, gave magnificent feeds; and this continued for years. When the war broke out he took it into his head that the rebels would land in the city, capture it, and deprive him of his property, in consequence of his endeavours to make the negro character of consequence. The result has been very distressing. In the midst of affluence, he thought of nothing but his probable poverty, and he who had caused millions to be convulsed with laughter, sat by his own fireside, day after day, a picture of the deepest woe.

This is, alas! but one of a very long catalogue of names of men to whom the acquisition of unaccustomed wealth has proved a bane rather than a blessing; but there is little fear that the name of Monsieur Blondin will swell the list, since the cool head and steady nerve which enable him to cross nimbly a rope at an altitude which turns the gazer's sight dizzy, will also enable him to mount the heights of

fortune with a steady foot and a clear, calm brain; whilst the presence of mind so essential to men engaged in hazardous enterprises, and which he possesses in so eminent a degree, will be as likely to preserve him from collapse under misfortune and to sustain him until he can regain his position, as it did when on a recent occasion the inadvertence of an assistant precipitated him headlong from the rope, and he succeeded in saving himself by catching the rope with his feet.

From this view of his character, it will be rightly inferred that Monsieur Blondin is in no way infected with the loose and irregular habits which attach themselves to too many members of the acrobatic profession. He is neither a spend-thrift nor a debauchee, but a careful, prudent man, jealous of his own self-respect, and of the obligations which he owes to his family and society. His leisure hours which, of course, form a very considerable item in his life, are by him turned to a profitable account,—either in hard study, in imparting information to the young progeny of Blondins, or in pursuing some handicraft, for which he has the necessary tools and appliances, and with the practice of which he has already made himself intimately acquainted.

To give one instance of his mechanical genius, he has invented a new description of skate, fashioned upon a very novel principle, the object of which is to enable the wearer to glide freely along the ice on a first attempt, with perfect ease and security. This ingenious and effective invention has been patented in America, and its introduction into England is very desirable. It is true that the Northern Americans, like the Hollanders, from the very peculiar character of country and climate, are skaters as a people, partly from necessity, whilst here it is merely an open-air pastime. Nevertheless, the votaries of the skate in England are not few by any means, the fair sex even indulging in this bracing exercise, may be seen gliding on the frozen

surface of the Serpentine, with ease and grace, and we may add daring, considering the numerous and serious accidents which occur every winter, not merely from the insecurity of the ice, or the unskilfulness of the skater, but from the mischances of broken straps or buckles, imperfect screws, flaws in the steel or wood, or defective construction of the entire skate. The introduction of a skate, which should obviate or remedy the imperfections of the one in general use, would be attended with advantage and safety, thereby increasing the number of those who rush to the ice for a pleasant and invigorating exercise. It was an accident of the class named, which called M. Blondin's attention to the inefficiency of the ordinary skate. Madame Blondin, accompanied by a party of friends, was enjoying this healthy recreation in the near neighbourhood of New York, when her skate suddenly turned, and she fell, dislocating her ankle, and was only preserved from other injury by the furs in which she was enveloped as a protection from the inclemency of the weather. After mature consideration, he constructed a skate which might be worn without fear by the greatest novice, whether lady or gentlemen.

But Monsieur Blondin's versability does not stop here. He is a tolerable mathematician, a good farmer, and an expert in various kinds of artistic labour; an adept at chess, a thorough horseman, and alive to rational enjoyment of every kind. Above all, he is a man of his word—faithful and just in all his transactions, and ready, when required, to lend a helping hand to the unfortunate and deserving; so that he is not only a thorough model in his profession—a sort of Representative man—but deporting himself in every way as becomes the gentleman of Nature's making—not the tailor's,—he is at liberty to carry his head higher and easier than some who, while spurning the vocation of the rope-dancer, might do well to emulate his simple, conscientious, and unpretending character.

For, after all, let people say what they will about avocations in life, calling one respectable, and condemning another as the very reverse of it; every pursuit is respectable, be it what it may, that yields an ample and honourable livelihood. It is not what a man does, but what he is, that makes him more or less a man. A rope-dancer may be a gentleman, and a monarch a blackguard. All labour is dignified, whether of the head, the hands, or the feet. Men may dishonour their calling, but if only true to themselves, it can never dishonour them. It is, no doubt, a very foolish and a very hazardous thing in the eyes of some people, for Monsieur Blondin to walk the high rope; but are there not persons a thousand times more ridiculous and foolhardy than he, who yet set themselves up as very wise, and discreet, and becoming sort of people; who risk their lives and property every day, and instead of gaining by it, are losing everything that is worth striving for and holding fast.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FUTURE OF BLONDIN.

The International Exhibition of 1862, being calculated to attract a very large concourse of persons from every part of the world to the British metropolis, an engagement has been made with the agent of Monsieur Blondin, by the Crystal Palace Company, for a series of fifty performances, to take place during the present season. About one-third of these performances have already taken place, and the others will follow at irregular intervals, as often as opportunity seems to serve, or as special occasions arise to call for them. At one of these performances which took place in May last, Monsieur Blondin had the honour of a personal introduction to Mr. D'Israeli, Mr. Gladstone, and several more distinguished members of the House of Commons, with whom he held a lengthened conversation in French, and had the pleasure of learning from their own lips, that they took the liveliest interest in his extraordinary performances. Mr. D'Israeli enquired of the great rope-walker, if he did not sometimes feel apprehensive of danger.

"Never!" was the reply. "You must have an iron nerve," said the statesman. Monsieur Blondin responded with a bow and shrug of the shoulders. "Shall I walk the high rope to-day?" he asked, addressing himself to Mr. Baring, M.P. (it was a large and fashionable gathering of Mr. Baring's personal friends, and, in compliance with the request of that gentleman, only the low rope had been called into requisition). The member for Portsmouth turned round to consult the ladies, whose feelings on the subject were instantly betrayed in a very significant expression of countenance. "No, thank you," he rejoined, and the interview terminated.

When the entire series of performances appointed to take place at the Crystal Palace during the present season is concluded, and a number of provincial engagements, which he is now occupied in fulfilling, are got through, Monsieur Blondin purposes starting for the continent of Europe, where he will, no doubt, run as successful and brilliant a career, as he has done in this country, and win there, as here, the good opinion of the public out of doors, and the admiration and friendship of all with whom he may happen to come in contact.

According to a communication which has appeared in one of the French papers, when Monsieur Blondin goes to Paris he proposes crossing the Seine upon a rope, stretched between the Palace of the Tuileries and barrack of the Quai d'Orsay. The scheme has already been submitted, it is said, to the proper authorities—including the Emperor—and has met with his approval; but the proceeds of the exhibition, which will, no doubt prove very considerable, are intended to be appropriated to the use of a public charity. He will further add to the interest of the event, says another informant, by making an ostrich walk the rope with him—a feat which, should it prove successful, will fully rival the antics of Bruin in the Roman circus; but,

as Monsieur Blondin has so far preserved strict silence on the subject, being a man of few words, and not given to boast or divulge his plans, if he can help it—the statement in question must be taken for what it is worth. Of one thing, however, the French public may feel well assured, that whatever Blondin has promised to do, he will do, to the very letter. He will not, like the “Weird Sisters,” on whose babblings the murderer of Duncan vainly relied, “keep the word of promise to the ear” only, and “break it to the hope.” Throughout his now rather lengthened and eventful career, he has never once disappointed an audience of spectators from any cause over which he had control, nor failed to carry out any promise that emanated from him.

Mr. Coleman, his manager-in-chief, who discharges a greater number of duties for his employer than ever fell to the lot of a government official—who is his secretary, his cashier, his stage-manager, the arbiter of his taste, the negotiator of all his engagements, and his travelling companion in every professional journey, whether distant or near, and who yet contrives to execute every task delegated to him with an activity and promptitude which might be profitably copied in our great Circumlocution Office,—is already on the alert in preparing the way for a Continental tour. First France, then Russia, then Spain and Portugal, then Germany and Italy, if the Italian question do not stand in the way; so runs the programme. This will bring Monsieur Blondin up to the end of the year 1864 or the beginning of 1865,—if he do not break his neck in the interim,—by which time he hopes to have amassed a sufficient sum of money to enable him to return to America, the country of his adoption, and the birthplace of his amiable and accomplished wife, and there spend the remainder of his days in comfort and affluence, surrounded by an interesting little family, to whom he is devotedly



attached, and within an easy distance of the memorable scene of his greatest exploits.

Thus, the one great object of his life, next to distinguishing himself above and beyond all rope-dancers, ancient or modern; an object which contributed early in life to fascinate him with a perilous career, has been to preserve his independence before the world, and make such a provision for the future, when age and helplessness present themselves, as is incumbent upon every man of proper feeling and providential motives. Not one acrobat in a hundred obeys this great natural instinct and sense of duty, for the simple reason that—unlike Monsieur Blondin, and many others in various walks of life who have elected to be that which they are, and have achieved success in consequence—not one in a hundred of the spangled fraternity has assumed the vocation of his own accord. It has been to them a matter of compulsion, and their early jackets were laced with more tears than gold embroidery. Nevertheless, in their “voluntary servitude” they are as pains-taking as if they loved the labour. It is easy to say that had the amount of application bestowed by them to achieve perfection in their peculiar line been given to the accomplishment of more useful tasks, they might have been more profitable and more distinguished members of society. This is so much cant. The poor fellows have never had the chance; yet each man exerts himself to the very utmost to distinguish himself in that state of life in which chance, contempt, or—who shall say it?—design has placed him. Had they been differently situated, they would have been different, and have done differently. And what more can be said of any of us? from the Archbishop of Canterbury, or the Lord Chancellor downwards? We are what we are, and let every man try to make the best of it.

Let none say, then, that Monsieur Blondin's is not a

